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# SHIFTING PEDAGOGY FOR ADOLESCENT REFUGEES WITH LIMITED OR INTERRUPTED FORMAL EDUCATION: A CASE STUDY OF THE PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCES OF A SECONDARY ENGLISH LITERACY DEVELOPMENT TEACHER

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by

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THESIS

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**ABSTRACT**

In recent years, there has been a large influx of refugees into settlement countries worldwide. In Canada, this displaced population includes many adolescent students of limited or interrupted formal education (SLIFE). Consequently, secondary school teachers are challenged to meet the print literacy needs of SLIFE within traditional ESL instructional settings.

The literature reveals an urgent desire and need for the use of early literacy instructional practices to address the print literacy needs of SLIFE. Despite this acknowledgement, many ESL/ELD secondary school educators are reluctant to shift their pedagogy from traditional ESL to early literacy pedagogy (Dooley, 2009; Dooley & Thangaperumal, 2011; Kanu, 2008; Woods, 2009). Specific barriers have been cited including teachers' attitudes about traditional ESL instructional practices, teachers' attitudes about their preparedness to teach SLIFE, teachers' attitudes about SLIFE, and teachers' attitudes about their role as educators of SLIFE.

The purpose of this single subject case study was to explore how a secondary teacher, trained in traditional ESL instructional practices, developed her professional knowledge base to work within an English Literacy Development (ELD) program rooted in early literacy pedagogy.

Data was collected and analyzed using an inductive process that involved semi-structured interviews, followed by coding and thematic, critical interpretation.

The results of this study provide insights into factors that influenced one teacher's conceptions of self, SLIFE, pedagogy, and conditions for success, leading her

to shift, over time, from traditional ESL to early literacy instructional practices. These factors included her use of personal practical knowledge, data-informed pedagogy, student-centred pedagogy, learning through social interaction, and a social justice perspective. The findings of this study are revelatory because there has been no research conducted, to the knowledge of this researcher, focusing on the experiences of teachers of SLIFE working within an early literacy program.

INDEX WORDS: Adolescent refugee; Critical constructivism; Data-informed pedagogy; Early literacy; English Literacy Development; Learning through social interaction; Personal practical knowledge; Print literacy; Refugee youth; Secondary school; Students of limited or interrupted formal education (SLIFE); Social justice; Student-centred pedagogy; Teacher education.

**DEDICATION**

To my dad—the ultimate Jedi Master.

“Always pass on what you have learned.”

~ Yoda

**ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

As with my participant, Sara, there have been a series of "narrative unities" (Connelly, Clandinin, & He, 1997) in my life - common threads that have contributed to my professional knowledge development as an ESL/ELD teacher and trainer. Although I did not grow up in a multicultural environment, I knew my journey had begun when, as a new teacher, I took a job at an adult ESL school. It was there that I met Jamal, a Kurdish man who had fled Iraq because of the ethnic persecution that he endured during the Gulf War. Working with Jamal, as well as many other refugee students then and since, opened my eyes to the human rights violations that occur worldwide, denying people opportunities that I had taken for granted, such as attending school. I would like to acknowledge and thank all the English language learners that I have taught during my twenty-five years in education, particularly the adolescent SLIFE at the secondary school where I currently work, for broadening my worldview and teaching me many invaluable lessons.

This original thread combined with many others wove a tapestry of experiences that contributed, in profound ways, to who I am today as an educator and, which ultimately, inspired this research study. I recall a day approximately five years ago when I met my thesis advisor, Dr. Kristiina Montero, at a colleague's dissertation presentation. Little did I know that this chance meeting, which turned into a two hour "chat", would lead me to apply, soon after, to the Master of Education (MEd) program. I was very fortunate to meet Dr. Montero that day and I am extremely grateful for the wisdom she has shared and her ongoing guidance throughout the MEd program,

particularly during my thesis investigation. I have deep respect for her depth of knowledge and value the friendship that we have developed through this journey.

I would like to also extend my sincere gratitude to Dr. Steve Sider, my thesis committee member, and Dr. Cathy Miyata, my thesis external examiner, for their careful examination of my thesis and guidance. Undoubtedly, their valuable critiques and suggestions helped me to take this research study to a higher level. Thank you, as well to Dr. Carolyn FitzGerald, for her willingness to chair my thesis defence.

I am extremely thankful for having had the opportunity to interview my participant, whom I am, unfortunately, unable to name because of our confidentiality agreement. This study would not have been possible without her willingness to share her journey as an educator of SLIFE. Thank you, “Sara”, for your openness and honesty during our “talks” and for your genuine care for the welfare and future opportunities of the students that you teach. Your eagerness to learn new ways to meet the early literacy needs of SLIFE and, transform the way you teach, is truly inspiring.

During my years of teaching ELLs, I have been privileged to work with many esteemed colleagues and I am thankful, to all, for the many things they taught have me. I would like to particularly express my wholehearted appreciation to ESL/ELD consultant, Sharon Newmaster, for sharing her expertise with me over the years and for her ongoing support and encouragement as a partner in education and as a friend. My gratitude also extends to Monica who, early on, asked a question that began our search for answers. As well, I thank my lucky stars every day to have the opportunity to work with an amazing team of secondary ELD teachers. Their passion for adopting early

literacy instruction for SLIFE is remarkable and the positive impact that they are having on their students' lives knows no bounds.

Finally, I am deeply indebted to my family and friends for their ongoing encouragement. First and foremost, I would like to thank my loving husband, Brad, for his unfailing support during this often challenging, but ultimately fulfilling, journey. There is no doubt that I could not have done this without him and I will be eternally grateful that he enabled me to achieve one of my life goals. I would also like to thank my beautiful daughter, and brave little survivor, Mali. Her tenacity and resilience serves as a daily reminder that anything is possible if you set your mind to it.

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# CHAPTER 1

## Introduction

Over the past decade, the number of ***refugees***[1] seeking ***resettlement*** or ***asylum***, because of mass violence, disaster and/or human rights violations has steadily grown. More recently, and culminating with the crisis in Syria, the number of those forced to flee their homes into neighbouring countries or within their own countries (internally displaced persons) has increased dramatically with a record number reaching over 65 million; the number of refuges under United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) mandate has reached 16.1 million by the end of 2016 (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2016). Finally, after years of displacement, thousands of refugees are being granted permanent residency in countries such as the United States, Australia and Canada, which have received 90% of resettled refugees (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2016). Justin Trudeau, Prime Minister of Canada, stated that he would "make sure it [was] done right" (CBC/Radio-Canada, 2015) when he personally welcomed the first wave of refugees to Canada in early 2016, and then adjusted timelines for subsequent arrivals, giving his government more time to prepare for the massive influx of newcomers. In doing so, Trudeau and his government recognized that it is not just the initial welcome of refugees that is important, but the way in which sponsoring countries provide

[1] The definitions for all bolded italicized words can be found in the Glossary in Appendix A. These words are bold italicized the first time they appear in the text.

ongoing support for refugees that will ultimately determine their ability to thrive, rather than just survive, in their new home.

Although all refugee children and youth are highly vulnerable, ***adolescent refugees*** are, arguably, the most adversely impacted within this group (Ehntholt & Yule, 2006). Viewed as the most physically capable, some adolescent refugees endure trauma when they are forced to flee their home countries without their families. These youth, as well as many more accompanied by family members, may have also suffered the cumulative effects of war and displacement from a young age. Many have experienced interrupted education in their home countries, and have received poor quality or limited schooling in countries of exile. Consequently, by the time newcomer adolescent refugees arrive in their permanent ***host countries***, they have accumulated significant barriers to learning. In addition, these students face the added challenge of having limited time to close large academic gaps before reaching the maximum age to attend secondary school, which is twenty-one years of age in Ontario. As explained by Bigelow (Bigelow, 2010), "[i]t is particularly difficult for those who arrive well into adolescence… without the benefit of prior schooling to ease the transition to work or school in a society permeated by text" (DeCapua, Smathers, & Tang, 2009). Yet, despite facing many barriers, these students are highly resilient and are usually optimistic about their future in a new country, where they will have the opportunity to attend school, sometimes for the first time (Bragin & Opiro, 2012; Ehntholt, Smith, & Yule, 2005; Stewart, 2012). Consequently, adolescent refugees arriving in Canada face many

barriers but are also filled with high hopes and expectations for their education and future.

A more detailed explanation of the experiences and surrounding circumstances impacting refugee youth, in settlement countries such as Canada, is required for a full understanding of this research study. First, I will define and name an especially vulnerable sub group of adolescent refugees, who will be referenced throughout this study. Next, I will discuss specific barriers faced by these students that directly impact their ability to learn in academic settings. Finally, I will describe several alternative instructional strategies that have been implemented with ***English language learners (ELLs)*** with a broad range of literacy skills and will discuss their suitability for adolescent refugees with limited prior schooling.

**Systemic Responses**

The permanent displacement of refugees has multiple impacts, not only on migrating individuals and families, but also on receiving host countries. Although many Canadians have embraced the idea of providing a new home for thousands of refugees over the past few years, it has been a massive undertaking involving all sectors of society. As stated by Trudeau during the influx of newcomers from Syria, "This is not about government signing a paper and bringing over refugees, this is a whole of Canada effort" (CBC/Radio-Canada, 2015). While social service agencies are scrambling to meet the physical and mental health needs of newcomer refugees, Ontario school boards are, with a sense of urgency, increasing their focus and resources on English language programs (***English as a Second Language (ESL)*** and ***English Literacy***

***Development (ELD)***). In secondary schools, ESL and ELD courses are intended to prepare newcomer students, of all backgrounds, to integrate with the dominant linguistic and cultural group by learning the English language (i.e., listening, speaking, reading and writing skills). In many cases, however, secondary ESL/ELD teachers deliver ***traditional ESL instruction***, designed for ELLs with age-appropriate educational backgrounds and dominant language print literacy, to all students, including those with limited prior schooling. Unfortunately, this traditional ESL model denies the early literacy instructional needs of newcomer refugee students (Stewart, 2011, 2012). But, print literacy skills are essential to the academic success of adolescent refugee students and, consequently, "teachers must be willing to adapt and modify their curriculum to meet the changing demographics of the Canadian classroom" (Stewart, 2011, p. 79). (See Figure 1 in Appendix E for a graphic representation of Ontario language programming for English language learners).

**Naming Students from Refugee Backgrounds for the School Context**

Adolescent refugee students enter secondary schools in their ***settlement countries*** with a broad range of educational backgrounds. However, for the purposes of this study, clarification is needed regarding the definition and naming of a specific group of these refugee students with significant gaps in their ***dominant language*** print literacy skills. This group, although a part of a larger refugee demographic, requires close attention because of their vulnerability within school systems. The Ontario Ministry of Education refers to candidates for ELD programs as "ELLs with limited prior schooling" (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2008). Within this group, however, students

have many different levels of literacy competencies. Depending on their country of origin, dominant language and prior educational experiences, these students may be ***pre-literate, non-literate or semi-literate*** in their dominant language (Florez & Terrill, 2003). Students that are pre-literate have no print literacy because a written form of their dominant language does not exist. Non-literate students, however, have not learned to read and write in a dominant language that does have a written form. Semi-literate students have many gaps in formal education and, hence, have minimal dominant language print literacy, whereas those who are considered literate have had uninterrupted schooling and are able to read and write, age-appropriately, in their dominant language.

In response to a need to specifically identify ELLs with gaps in formal schooling, the New York City Department of Education (Advocates for Children of New York, 2010) coined the term ***Students with Interrupted Formal Education*** **(SIFE).** DeCapua, Smathers & Tang (2009) later revised this acronym to ***Students with Limited or Interrupted Formal Education*** (**SLIFE)**, to encompass a broader range of ELLs with low literacy by including students with "interrupted" formal education (i.e., very little or no prior schooling). For the purposes of this study, I will use the term SLIFE because it accurately reflects the range of dominant language print literacy skills amongst the more vulnerable refugee population in Ontario secondary schools and the focal population in this study. This is not with the intent of viewing these students from a deficit perspective, but to highlight the critical need for SLIFE to learn English print

literacy skills so that they may be successful in school and a society that highly values the printed word.

**Barriers Faced By SLIFE**

As large numbers of newcomer refugees relocate to host countries, there has been increased recognition worldwide that SLIFE face multiple barriers to learning, including their responses to traumatic experiences, cultural orientation, and gaps in formal schooling, which is more complex and difficult to overcome than those faced by immigrant students (Bigelow, 2010; Dooley, 2009; Montero, Newmaster, & Ledger, 2014; Stewart, 2012).

**Responses to traumatic experiences.** Many SLIFE have endured traumatic experiences, such as displacement from their home countries resulting from war, and witnessing or directly encountering extreme violence related to armed attacks, torture, rape, abduction and murder (McBrien, 2005). In addition to these traumatic pre-flight experiences, the emotional well-being of these adolescents is further exacerbated by stressful events occurring in refugee camps and/or other temporary housing communities within their host countries where they may experience a variety of settlement issues (e.g., linguistic and cultural differences, poverty, racial discrimination and humiliation) (Chiumento, Nelki, Dutton, & Hughes, 2011; Ellis & MacDonald, 2008; Stewart, 2012). This cumulative exposure to traumatic experiences has residual effects on the socio-emotional and cognitive development of adolescent SLIFE, making them vulnerable to the effects of psychological disorders such as anxiety, clinical depression and ***Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)*** (Ellis & MacDonald, 2008).

These experiences are compounded by the fact that many SLIFE lose parents, family members and/or friends due to death or forced separation. Refugees from Africa and Southeast Asia often originate from ***collectivist cultures*** in which people view themselves as connected to networks, or extended groups (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2001). Consequently, the developing self-concept of SLIFE is often directly linked to family and the broader cultural community. According to Bragin (2005) profound loss, in combination with other sources of trauma, can lead to a decreased capacity for symbol formation (externalized abstract thought) and metacognition (internalized reflective thought) in children and adolescents. These higher levels of cognition are developed through interaction with one's community and significant others. Consequently, when SLIFE are displaced, they may struggle in a new country and culture to construct their general self-concept, as well as their ***identity*** as a learner.

**Cultural orientation.** Although SLIFE may not have had formal learning opportunities, they bring with them a broad range of experiences and competencies acquired from their cultural communities. However, these ***funds of knowledge*** (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992) that have been gained from informal educational settings are often not recognized or understood in traditional Western-style school settings. Researchers concur that SLIFE are adversely affected by ***cultural dissonance***: a mismatch of expectations and assumptions that occurs when the cultural orientation of two or more groups intersect (Bigelow, 2010; Bragin & Opiro, 2012; DeCapua & Marshall, 2011b; Stewart, 2012). As a result, SLIFE often find it difficult to demonstrate their previously acquired knowledge in classrooms that are focused on individual

learning goals because they lack the meaningful context of a learning community. Unfortunately, educators sometimes misinterpret this withdrawal as an indication that SLIFE are experiencing significant cognitive, rather than cultural, gaps.

In addition to the incongruity between ***collectivist and individualist*** orientations (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2001), SLIFE also encounter cultural dissonance when they enter an educational system that is focused on ***academic*** rather than ***pragmatic*** learning (DeCapua & Marshall, 2011b). For SLIFE, "learning comes through participation in the daily activities of life, and from an early age, they observe and join in family and community labors and endeavors" (Moll et al., 1992). This view of education is not a disadvantage but rather the result of a different cultural orientation. Yet, traditional western-style classrooms often separate learning from authentic experience and value abstract thought, reasoning and metacognition above practical knowledge. This creates a situation in which SLIFE find it difficult to acquire new knowledge because they fail to understand the relevance and function of abstract concepts to their immediate lives.

**Gaps in formal education.** Most adolescent immigrant students are faced with the difficult task of progressing academically within secondary schools as they adjust to a new language and culture (Collier, 1989; Freeman, Freeman, & Mercuri, 2002). But, students who are literate in their dominant language have the advantage of being able to transfer these skills while learning to read and write in English, giving them a greater academic advantage within traditional and ***content-based ESL programs*** (W. P. Thomas & Collier, 1997). In Canada, the relative academic success of some ethnic refugee

groups, as compared to others, illustrates the importance of first language literacy, even when refugee students are faced with other barriers to learning (Wilkinson, 2002). In her study, for example, Wilkinson found that even though all ninety-one adolescent participants in her study had been victims of war and/or human rights violations, some groups, such as those of Bosnian heritage, experienced more academic success than other groups after studying in Canada for several years. Regarding this, Wilkinson identified the most impactful factors as being prior experiences in refugee camps (including access, or lack of access, to education) and the appropriateness of the students' grade and program placement (e.g., ***ESL or ELD integrated or sheltered programs***) once in Canadian schools. These factors not only suggested that literate students, with consistent educational backgrounds, have an academic advantage but that they are also placed in more appropriate language programs when they are enrolled in Canadian schools.

While comparing the achievement of ELLs immersed in traditional and content-focused ESL models of instruction, Thomas & Collier (W. P. Thomas & Collier, 1997) discovered that dominant language literacy had a significant influence on their overall findings: "We found that ***L1*** [first language] grade-level schooling in home country was an important predictor of academic success in ***L2*** *[second language]*, with those students who had experienced interrupted schooling achieving at a much lower level in L2 [i.e., English]" (p. 66). Additionally, Gunderson (2009) concluded a decade later that newcomer adolescent refugee students with low print literacy skills were at a

significantly greater risk of attrition from high school than students of immigrant backgrounds.

**Alternative Instructional Strategies for ELLs**

Resulting from these complex barriers to learning, SLIFE require different second language instructional strategies that specifically respond to their various social emotional, psychosocial and learning needs. Despite the lack of substantial research regarding the instructional needs of this population (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2008), several research-based programs have been documented with learning contexts that address some of these barriers to learning. Some of these programs (e.g., ***CALLA, SIOP***) were designed for English language learners with dominant language print literacy skills, but have produced some benefits for SLIFE. Other instructional frameworks (e.g., ***MALP***) were specifically developed for SLIFE in response the unique learning requirements, and increasing numbers, of this student population. Individual student needs, in addition to curriculum expectations, were factors in the development of these programs.

**Cognitive Academic Language Learning Approach (CALLA).** The CALLA program (Chamot & O'Malley, 1994, 1996) evolved as an alternative to traditional theme-based ESL instruction. As ELLs began to face increasing linguistic and cognitive demands in ***content-area classes,*** it became apparent that students required support with learning subject-related information, and accompanying vocabulary, while they were learning English. Adolescent ELLs particularly need a program in which they could learn language and content simultaneously because of the limited time available for them to

attend school. Although there are many benefits to this approach for ELLs who have immigrated to resettlement countries with age-appropriate dominant language literacy in their first language, this program does not address the early literacy needs of SLIFE or their socio-emotional and psychosocial requirements.

**Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP).** Several years later, Echevarría, Powers, & Short (2006) developed the SIOP model in response to the U.S. education reform movement. By adapting a mainstream program, they sought to address the academic literacy needs of ELLs. More specifically, the purpose of this sheltered instruction program was to improve ELL's comprehension of content-area vocabulary and their usage of it during writing activities. Similar to the CALLA program, students were encouraged to access prior knowledge and experiences in the SIOP program, however this was done with a stronger awareness of the "implicit cultural expectations of the classroom" (Wilkinson, 2002) (i.e., emphasis on academic rather than pragmatic forms of instruction). As well, both the CALLA and SIOP programs include socially mediated learning opportunities for students to co-construct knowledge. Like the CALLA program, however, SIOP does not address the early literacy needs of SLIFE who have limited or no literacy in their dominant language or in English. Although ELLs are recognized as a diverse group and who "differ in educational backgrounds, [and] expectations of schooling" (Wilkinson, 2002), specific strategies for teaching early literacy skills to SLIFE are absent from SIOP.

**Mutually Adaptive Learning Paradigm (MALP).** ***MALP*** (DeCapua & Marshall, 2011a) was specifically designed for adolescent SLIFE with a focus on understanding

the cultural factors that affect learning, as opposed to acknowledging culture as separate content. Rather than simply implementing a program that supports SLIFE, DeCapua and Marshall asserted that educators should also consider cultural factors from home and host countries that influence SLIFE and create *necessary conditions* for their learning through MALP. They identify two main cultural dichotomies that influence SLIFE in learning environments: ***collectivist and individualist*** worldviews (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2001), as well as ***pragmatic and academic*** modes of learning and conceptualizing (DeCapua & Marshall, 2011a) . By balancing these factors in the classroom, educators strive to bridge student perspectives with Western views. MALP exposes SLIFE to instructional strategies and content that is both familiar and new through best practices recommended by DeCapua and Marshall such as sheltered instruction, small group work, collaborative and experiential learning. A key component of this blended approach is that unfamiliar academic ways of thinking are introduced by making connections to students' background experiences and cultures. This benefits SLIFE who have experienced multiple losses under traumatic circumstances and need learning opportunities that allow them to develop new schemata by linking to prior knowledge (Bragin & Opiro, 2012).

DeCapua and Marshall's paradigm recognizes that since SLIFE have multiple barriers to learning, unique conditions must be created in classrooms. When coupled with committed and well-trained teachers, MALP provides a culturally responsive framework that has the potential to assist semi-literate SLIFE in some ways. In sheltered settings, MALP places less emphasis on content literacy than CALLA and SIOP

and more on oral fluency in English and reading and writing skills, such as identifying and constructing the parts of a paragraph (DeCapua, Smathers, & Tang, 2007). As with the CALLA and SIOP programs, however, the MALP model assumes that SLIFE have some dominant-language print literacy and, consequently, it fails to meet the early literacy needs of many semi-literate, non-literate and preliterate SLIFE.

Nevertheless, a growing number of researchers have identified a critical need for adolescent SLIFE to access targeted early literacy programs so that they may acquire the print literacy skills needed to progress academically (Brown, Miller, & Mitchell, 2006; Dooley, 2009; Gunderson, 2009; Kanu, 2008; MacNevin, 2012; Miller, 2009; Montero et al., 2014; Stewart, 2012; A. Thomas, 2007; Woods, 2009). But, for secondary teachers of SLIFE, this requires "considerable pedagogical innovation… as they [often] discover that pedagogies, which worked for learners with continuous and high quality prior schooling, are inadequate for [certain groups] of refugees" (Dooley, 2009, p. 8). Since these students do not have the advantage of first language literacy transference, they require individualized programming, including the explicit teaching of language structures and features (i.e. phonemic, syntactic, semantic) so that they are able to read and comprehend increasingly difficult levels of texts (A. Thomas, 2007). As stated by early literacy pioneer, Marie Clay (1998), emergent readers require reading programs that provide "different paths to common outcomes" (p. 1).

Yet, little research has been conducted regarding specific early literacy programs that teach SLIFE *how* to read *while* they reading to learn. While semi-literate students can transfer *some* knowledge about print literacy, non-literate and preliterate

students, lack a point of reference and are easily overwhelmed by the strong emphasis on print in all aspects of school. Semi-literate SLIFE usually originate from print-based societies where access to education has been interrupted because of mass violence, disaster and/or human rights violations. Because of the societal value placed on formal schooling, these SLIFE may feel ashamed about their illiteracy. Whereas, non-literate or preliterate SLIFE usually originate from cultures where knowledge is most often transmitted orally, rather than through print (DeCapua & Marshall, 2011a). In oral cultures, elders pass on practical and conceptual knowledge to community members through storytelling, verbal demonstrations and re-enactments. Unfortunately, although knowledge gathered and passed on through oral transmission is rich, its transmission may be halted during times of violence or disaster.

In Canada, there has been a growing recognition over the past two decades that SLIFE have vastly different background experiences than ***immigrant*** ELLs. In 2008, the province of Ontario designated two distinct English language programs for ELLs—ESL and ELD—when they released a guide book for Ontario educators on ways to support ELLs with limited prior schooling (or SLIFE) (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2008). The need for alternative programming for SLIFE has been acknowledged in Ontario at the secondary school level through the establishment of five required ***ELD language credit courses (ELD A, B, C, D, and E)*** which students must complete before progressing to ESL courses. These courses are based on the ELD ***STEPs to English Language Proficiency (STEP) continuum***; a graduated framework for assessing and monitoring the language acquisition and literacy development of SLIFE. STEP assists ELD secondary

teachers by distinguishing the language and literacy needs of SLIFE from students who are literate in their dominant language and are assessed using the ESL STEP continuum. But, although this continuum provides necessary criterion for teachers, it does not give a clear direction regarding best instructional practices for this unique population of students. Also, ELD teachers are generally not trained in the early literacy pedagogy that SLIFE require (Dooley, 2009; Gunderson, 2009). Despite the development of a separate ELD program and language courses in some provinces such as Ontario, there has not been systemic recognition of the need for early literacy training for secondary ELD teachers across Ontario, Canada or abroad. In Stewart's (2011) Canadian study, one secondary teacher requested specific early literacy training to assist her with teaching SLIFE. But, although her school board had set a goal for improving the literacy skills of all students, no specialized training was provided for the teacher. Dooley (2009) attempted to explain this disconnect by suggesting that there may be a stigma that associates early literacy instruction with ***primary school pedagogy***. Nevertheless, she concluded from her interviews with adolescents in Australia that "it is the high school that must change in order to cater to the pedagogical needs of students with little, no or severely interrupted schooling" (p. 16). This view is echoed by Gunderson (2009) who states that, in the Canadian context, "there is a need for deep ESL literacy expertise… [and] for researchers and educators who are ESL (ELL)-literacy experts" (p. 250).

Although there is clearly a gap between the instructional needs of SLIFE and actual teaching practice, the recent and rapid influx of adolescent SLIFE into Ontario

secondary schools has generated several early literacy instruction initiatives. Montero, Newmaster, and Ledger (2014) conducted a case study on a sheltered ELD A class that was immersed in an early literacy program. In this study, a group of eleven SLIFE showed statistically significant growth in their reading levels after participating in a structured ***guided reading*** program for five months, led by an ELD teacher trained in early literacy instructional practices. Specifically, they made an average reading gain of 8.3 levels compared to students enrolled in the same level program two years prior without a guided reading program. To put this in context, the target progression for a Grade One student is from level 1-15 within a full school year. Montero et al.'s results also showed significant improvement in SLIFE's receptive and expressive vocabulary because of daily early literacy instruction. Given the promising results in this study, there is evidence to suggest that SLIFE's language and literacy skills may be improved simultaneously through early literacy instruction. Also of interest, the ELD teacher (Sofia) in Montero et al.'s study underwent a significant shift in pedagogy from a traditional ESL language-based approach to daily early literacy instruction with small groups of students. Initially, Sofia did not expect to embrace the early literacy strategies and later expressed surprise at how it assisted her when teaching SLIFE:

> It is interesting to say [that guided reading and running records] was exactly what I thought I wouldn't do. I was hesitant to do running records in such a structured and organized way…I started doing running records to follow up on [students'] reading. And it goes so easily. It is fair for the kids…[even] when I don't do guided reading, my instruction focuses on teaching points that I

noticed while doing the guided reading and running records. I feel excited. (p. 67)

Even though Sofia, ultimately, underwent a pedagogical shift that transformed the way she taught SLIFE, her experience suggests that other ELD teachers may also express a reluctance to learn and implement early literacy strategies. This hesitance may be due, in part, to barriers experienced by educators such as a lack of professional development, resources and ongoing support (Dooley, 2009; MacNevin, 2012; Matthews, 2008; Miller, 2009; Montero et al., 2014; Stewart, 2012; Woods, 2009). Since early literacy training is, traditionally, not a part of a secondary ELD teacher's pre-service education, ongoing professional development in this area is a necessary precursor to implementation. Age-appropriate and culturally relevant ***levelled texts*** for guided reading instruction and running record assessment are also necessary components. Additionally, it is imperative to have system supports in place for early literacy programs to be sustainable at the secondary level (Dooley & Thangaperumal, 2011; Matthews, 2008). But, even without these supports in place, an inspired teacher in Dooley's (2009) study followed her instincts about what SLIFE need to succeed academically: "I found myself inventing guided reading "lessons" on the run to deepen comprehension and critical understanding of texts brought from reading" (p. 13). Although Montero, Newmaster and Ledger (2014) and Dooley's (2009) research suggested that some secondary teachers recognized the need to use early literacy instruction with SLIFE, these teachers were sometimes hesitant to embrace these strategies. Sofia's experience suggested that even if professional development training,

resources and systemic supports were in place to support teachers in an early literacy program, they were still reluctant to take on these practices. Yet, the fact that Sofia, and the teacher referenced by Dooley, eventually adopted early literacy strategies indicates that there may be additional factors influencing individuals to make pedagogical shifts to meet the needs of SLIFE.

## Situating the Researcher within this Study

Prior to becoming a teacher, I had charted a course in journalism. I had an English literature degree as my foundation, as well as a strong desire to seek the truth and tell other people's stories. But, all of that changed, when I volunteered at an English as a Second Language school for newcomer adults during the summer of 1991, following the completion of my undergraduate degree.

I was assigned to a beginner level ESL class and was asked to work individually with a young man from Iraq named Jamal. His teacher gave me what seemed to be a straightforward task: teach him the letters of the alphabet and their corresponding sounds. I eagerly equipped myself with a stack of flashcards and an alphabet chart. I was somewhat aware that this would be more challenging than teaching a child, but I was confident that I could help Jamal to "crack the code". Naively, however, I didn't question why this young man didn't know the English alphabet, beyond assuming that it was because he was a newcomer to Canada who was learning a new language.

On that first day, it quickly became apparent that Jamal was not only experiencing great difficulty with recalling the letters that I patiently drilled, but that he also seemed to have little interest in learning them. When I persisted, Jamal became

agitated and then abruptly pushed the flash cards away. I remember feeling hurt and a little offended because I was trying very hard to help him with the beginning stages of learning to read in English. I questioned, to myself, why he failed to understand that literacy would be his path to economic survival and freedom in Canada. He would need to complete job application forms and eventually find employment. But, I soon realized that Jamal wanted to share something with me that was, at that moment, more important to him than strange symbols on cards. He tried desperately, with his limited oral English and wild gestures, to tell a hidden story that impassioned him with fear and rage. Suddenly, in frustration, he turned his back to me and clawed up his t-shirt with the two remaining fingers of his right hand. Until then, I hadn't noticed that the others were stumps. As he lifted his shirt, thick ribbons of scars that covered his back were revealed. Some were old, white and flat and others were more recent, reddish and raised. At that defining moment, my previous biases regarding how students learn, and what instructional strategies are most effective, were forever altered.

Jamal was a Kurdish refugee from Iraq who had fled a country ravaged by the Saddam Hussein regime. As a Kurd, he had never been permitted to attend school and had, therefore, not learned to read or write in his dominant language, Kurdish, or in the national language of Iraq, Arabic. I would later gain an understanding about his deep pride in his Kurdish heritage. He denied all association with the country of Iraq and instead identified his homeland as Kurdistan (although it was no longer designated as an official country). Because of the ongoing persecution of the Kurdish people, Jamal had been forced to flee his homeland, through the mountains at night, to the Turkish

border. He made two attempts but was captured and brutally tortured both times. Against all odds, he escaped his captors and his third attempt to flee across the border was successful. Shortly after, he and hundreds of other Kurds sought refuge in Canada.

My decision to become an ESL teacher can be traced to this very specific event, as well as the months that followed, as I continued to work with Jamal and many other young adults from refugee backgrounds. Jamal's scarred back was an etched window to the traumatic experiences of his past which would take years to heal and could never be erased. But, in time, I also realized that Jamal was resilient and was open to learning new things. He just needed people to bear witness to his past in a safe environment before he could move forward with his new life in Canada. As we continued to work together individually, and in small groups with other students, Jamal's stories gradually shifted to telling about his childhood, family and culture. These stories were deeply connected to his core identity and in sharing them he found inner healing, despite his battered body. Eventually, Jamal learned the alphabet and developed basic print literacy skills. This was a difficult process because he was becoming literate for the first time. But, through the process of telling his stories, and listening to the stories of others, Jamal could make personal connections to, and eventually make sense of, printed text in books. Several years later, he told me that understanding this "code" gave him a sense of control that he had not previously felt in his life.

Because of this experience, I pursed a career in education and taught elementary ELLs for twenty years. During this time, I received additional training in

early literacy instruction and adapted these strategies for elementary-aged ELLs. Subsequently, I was assigned an additional role as an early literacy resource teacher and trainer for secondary teachers of sheltered ELD English programs. These programs were situated at four ***ESL/ELD magnet sites***. These sites offered levelled courses (ELD A to E) for SLIFE who had varying levels of oral English and print literacy proficiencies. This ELD programming is guided by two key documents produced by the Ontario Ministry of Education: *Supporting English Language Learning with Limited Prior Schooling* (2008) and *Steps to English Proficiency* (2015). More recently, these four secondary ELD magnet sites were congregated into one "magnet" location, allowing for the consolidation of human and material resources and teacher training. This change created a strong sense of teamwork and collaboration between the teachers based at the new magnet site. My current role is to provide ongoing professional development in early literacy instruction, as well as coaching and mentoring, for a group of approximately twelve secondary teachers working in sheltered ELD English programs. I also work directly with SLIFE while conducting and modeling running record assessment (Clay, 1993) and guided reading (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996) instruction for the teachers of this program.

To my knowledge as a researcher and educator, this secondary ELD program is unique, considering its high degree of focused early literacy instruction for adolescent SLIFE, targeting individual and small group literacy needs on a daily basis. Because this is a pioneering program, without similar programs to reference, its development and

evolution has involved a considerable amount of reflective practice by myself, as well as all others involved.

As previously mentioned, Montero, Newmaster, and Ledger (2014) documented the effectiveness of this program for advancing the early reading levels of SLIFE. In this study, my interest lies in the how secondary ELD English teachers perceive their role as educators of SLIFE. Undoubtedly, teacher beliefs and practices directly impact adolescent SLIFE, a group that has been marginalized, in both historic and contemporary contexts, because their learning needs differ significantly from other ELLs (DeCapua & Marshall, 2011a; Stewart, 2011, 2012). As an ESL/ELD teacher with considerable experience working with SLIFE, I concur that there is a critical need for differentiated and more equitable instruction for this vulnerable population of students. It is this conviction that drives my practices as an educator, teacher trainer and facilitator, and motivates me, as researcher, to advocate for social justice within education. It is my hope that, by engaging and collaborating with other educators of SLIFE, meaningful action can be taken so that SLIFE may gain the knowledge and skills needed to transform their own lives in their settlement countries.

## Research Question

For this study, I conducted a single subject case study focusing on a secondary ELD English teacher of SLIFE. Using narrative methods of data collection and analysis, I explored the following question: **How does a secondary teacher, trained in traditional**

**ESL instructional practices, develop her professional knowledge base to work within an English Literacy Development (ELD) program rooted in early literacy pedagogy?**

## CHAPTER 2

## Review of the Literature

As the population of adolescent students from refugee backgrounds has increased in many western countries, it has become apparent that additional language and content-area instruction alone does not meet SLIFE's complex learning needs within a secondary school setting. Targeted interventions that focus on early literacy instruction are what SLIFE need to acquire a functional level of print literacy skills (Dooley, 2009; Gunderson, 2007, 2009; Kanu, 2008; Montero et al., 2014; A. Thomas, 2007; Woods, 2009). Yet, a thorough review of the literature revealed four key barriers that inhibit secondary teachers' willingness and ability to shift their instructional strategies to meet the print literacy needs of SLIFE. These barriers include teachers' attitudes about traditional ESL instructional practices, attitudes about their preparedness to teach SLIFE, attitudes about SLIFE and how these attitudes influence pedagogy, and attitudes about their role as educators of SLIFE. The term "attitudes" has been adopted from (Dooley, 2009; Kanu, 2008; Stewart, 2012) whose findings were based on single interviews with teachers. Consequently, they use the term "***attitudes***" (as well as "beliefs") to convey their interviewees' current beliefs about teaching SLIFE *at a point in time* and do not reflect how their beliefs *change over time*. To avoid confusion with the term "***conceptions***", which were used during the data analysis stage of my study to convey the idea of evolving beliefs and knowledge development, I have selected the term "attitudes" for the literature review.

**Barrier 1: Teachers' Attitudes About Traditional ESL Instructional Practices**

Although there is an urgent need for alternative programing for adolescent SLIFE, many researchers have documented reluctance on the part of educators to shift their practice from traditional ESL pedagogy to early literacy instruction (Dooley, 2009; Kanu, 2008; Woods, 2009). In Kanu's (2008) Canadian study, she concluded that "although the student population in the schools…was changing, many of the teachers observed… did not adapt their curricula, instruction, assessment, and interaction patterns to this changing population" (p. 926). Based on her interviews with eight teachers of SLIFE at a Canadian secondary school, Kanu concluded that, even with educators receiving professional development training applicable to servicing SLIFE, instructional changes were unlikely to occur because of individual teacher attitudes about ESL programming. This reluctance is, in part, connected to a deep foundation of pedagogy that guides ESL language instruction, stemming primarily from an assumption of age-appropriate first language literacy (Bigelow, 2010). Secondary ESL/ELD teachers' pre-service and ongoing training has traditionally focused on a thematic approach to additional language instruction at the beginner levels and by scaffolding content-area vocabulary and concepts at the higher levels (Freeman et al., 2002). But, culturally embedded lists of words are accessible to SLIFE only if they have background knowledge related to topics (e.g., family, seasons, community helpers) and can read and write at the level of instruction.

In addition, if course completion and graduation is a systemic goal for all secondary students, then students with unique learning needs, such as SLIFE, are

entitled to instruction that will give them the best chance of reaching these goals. Yet, Thomas and Collier's (W. P. Thomas & Collier, 1997) study determined that "LM [language minority] students who received ***ESL pull-out*** with no L1 schooling are most likely to leave school before high school completion" (p. 69), as opposed to students with age-appropriate L1 education. In their study, "ESL pull-out" references a traditional ESL thematic language program as compared to language learning through content-area instruction. As previously mentioned, Gunderson (2009) concurred that secondary ELLs with low levels of dominant language literacy had limited time to close their academic gaps and were, therefore, at a greater risk of attrition.

Woods (2009) conducted a single subject case study based on interviews with a secondary ESL teacher who advocated that SLIFE have specific early literacy needs that distinguish them from ELLs with age-appropriate print literacy skills. As summarized by Woods: "Traditional approaches to language acquisition, while productive and effective models of pedagogy, are not adequate for the latest new [SLIFE] arrivals" (p. 14). Similarly, in a larger study, Dooley (2009) concluded from her interviews with secondary SLIFE, parents and ESL teachers that; "Every teacher of [adolescent] students with little, no or severely interrupted schooling, needs to be a teacher of not only language, as ESL teachers have long argued, but also of literacy – a new task of many ESL and high school subject area teachers" (p. 16).

**Barrier 2: Teachers' Attitudes Regarding their Preparedness to Teach SLIFE**

The literature also indicates that secondary educators' low self-efficacy, when teaching SLIFE, stems from a belief that they lack the systemic support, professional

development training and resources needed to address their students' early literacy needs (Matthews, 2008; Woods, 2009). In her study, Matthews (2008) identified a lack of systemic assessment, specifically the ongoing tracking of SLIFEs' levels of literacy, as a major barrier. Based on MacNevin's (2012) interviews with seven teachers of adolescent SLIFE at a Canadian high school, professional development related to teaching basic literacy skills to intermediate and secondary refugee youth was identified as a gap in support. In Montero, Newmaster and Ledger's study (2014), teachers working with SLIFE received ongoing early literacy training that assisted them with adopting strategies such as ***running record assessment*** and small group guided reading instruction (Dooley, 2009; MacNevin, 2012; Matthews, 2008; Miller, 2009; Woods, 2009). This model of early literacy instruction produced evidence that showed marked improvement in the reading levels of SLIFE. But, unfortunately, the vast majority of secondary teachers do not have access to early literacy instruction because it is viewed as "primary school curriculum" (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996) and, literacy specialists are not, customarily, assigned to collaborate with secondary ESL teachers.

Regarding this need for specialized literacy training for teachers of SLIFE, Woods (2009) identified "…a disjuncture among the needs of those students who arrive in high schools without literacy in their first language, the capacity of high schools to teach early literacy skills, and a basic lack of productive models of early literacy pedagogy" (p. 10). Woods' reference to a "lack of productive models" indicated that teachers not only lack training from an early literacy specialist but that successful early literacy program models for adolescent SLIFE are also absent. Woods also suggested that

secondary teachers are not prepared for a pedagogical shift that will challenge traditional systemic-based instructional practices. Dooley and Thangaperumal (2011) identified this obstacle more directly by linking the inconsistencies in teacher practice, when working with SLIFE, to "decades of tension between traditional and progressive pedagogies" (p. 394).

A lack of appropriate resources for early literacy instruction is also cited as a barrier in a few studies. Woods (2009) stated that issues related to lack of program models are compounded by "a lack of age and interest appropriate texts for young people with low levels of English literacy" (p. 90). Yet, it is important to note that, even though the teacher in Montero, Newmaster and Ledger's (2014) study was provided with ongoing guided reading training and age-appropriate levelled, non-fiction text, she initially remained hesitant to adopt early literacy pedagogy.

**Barrier 3: Teachers' Attitudes About SLIFE and How These Attitudes Influence Pedagogy**

A distinction is drawn in the literature between extrinsic and intrinsic factors affecting teacher beliefs about SLIFE and their instructional needs (Dooley & Thangaperumal, 2011). Stewart's (2012) interviews with students from refugee backgrounds and their teachers revealed a common theme that indicated that adolescent SLIFE's academic capabilities were often underestimated. In this study, the deficit assumptions of educators regarding SLIFE were linked, in part, to a lack of awareness regarding the educational and cultural backgrounds of SLIFE. Teachers "suggested that a lack of information about refugee students, combined with

inadequate support for the staff, was what contributed to these counterproductive attitudes" (Montero et al., 2014). For example, Stewart explained, assumptions were made by secondary teachers about SLIFE's print literacy skills, which led them to teach academic content that was inaccessible, even when it was highly scaffolded. Although SLIFE were cognitively able to learn and comprehend new academic content, they were not yet equipped with the reading and writing skills required to access subject specific information.

Yet, Stewart's (2012) findings suggested that the root of teachers' negative assumptions about SLIFE extended beyond a lack of awareness because of insufficient teacher training. She concluded that teachers who were most supportive of SLIFE exhibited empathy and were "those who [took] the time to personally connect with the student and who exhibit perseverance, patience and kindness" (Montero et al., 2014), suggesting that the intrinsic qualities of teachers also affected their perceptions of SLIFE and impacted their instructional practices. Based on her findings, Stewart asserted that positive relationships with SLIFE can make teachers more willing to adopt "intensive and flexible programming that can adjust to meet the unique needs of each student" (Montero et al., 2014).

In a larger case study, Stodolsky and Grossman (2000) surveyed approximately seven hundred secondary English and Mathematics teachers at schools that, a year prior to the study, underwent a court desegregation mandate. Because of this mandate, the student populations at the participating schools had shifted from predominantly white, upper middle-class and college bound youth to a high number of

immigrant and refugee students from low socio-economic status. Stodolsky and Grossman were interested in how the change in student demographics affected teachers' instructional practices. They concluded from the results of their survey that, although many teachers were unwilling to change their instructional practice, others were open to doing so. Among those teachers who did change their practice, some believed that SLIFE required program remediation rather than adaptation. As stated by Stodolsky & Grossman, "…the potential for lowering subject matter standards may accompany efforts to adapt to new students even among highly committed teachers" (p. 166).

In addition to their survey, Stodolsky and Grossman (2000) also conducted in-depth interviews with four teachers: two who changed their teaching practice, as a result of the change in student population, and two who did not. Although the teachers varied in their levels of cultural and racial awareness, Stodolsky and Grossman concluded that the tendency of teachers to adapt or not adapt to changing student needs went well beyond these factors. In particular, "a dynamic conception of subject matter, multiple goals, a personalized approach to students… and high expectations for student learning" (p. 166) were the key characteristics of teachers who underwent paradigm shifts. Teachers who prioritized the socio-emotional and learning needs of individual students and groups of marginalized students (e.g., SLIFE), over course expectations, were the most successful in adapting their instructional practice.

Similarly, Kanu's (2008) study, based on interviews with teachers of adolescent SLIFE, revealed that:

> [w]hether teachers did or did not reconceptualise and change their practice when faced with a new group of students depended, to a large extent, on their teaching goals, beliefs about student capability, conceptions about subject matter, [and] views about how students learn... (p. 926).

Kanu advocated that, at schools with changing demographics, teacher preparation must to go far beyond multicultural education in pre-service courses and school board in-services. Preparing teachers to teach academic content to more diverse learners will require "a broader vision that encompasses multifaceted teaching goals and beliefs about subject matter and students" (p. 937).

**Barrier 4: Teachers' Attitudes About Their Role as Educators of SLIFE**

Although many secondary ESL teachers recognize the unique learning needs of SLIFE, and have an asset-based view of their academic capabilities, they are still reluctant to shift from traditional language-based ESL pedagogy and/or content- area instruction to early literacy programming. The literature indicates that this reluctance is, in part, due to many educators' belief that their primary role is to teach curriculum to students, whether the content is comprehensible and the print text is accessible for SLIFE. Educators with this perspective believe that it is their responsibility to prepare all students, including SLIFE, for the academic rigors that lie ahead and to feel that they are doing a disservice to these students when they are not following this instructional model (Stodolsky & Grossman, 2000). As stated by Stodolsky & Grossman, this pedagogical dilemma between teaching to student needs or curriculum expectations occurs most dramatically at the secondary level when "issues of student diversity

intersect with concerns about subject matter" (p. 127). In other words, teachers who are accustomed to equating content mastery with academic advancement often have conflicting feelings when students are unable to comprehend their carefully planned lessons. In Walker-Dalhouse's (2009) study on Sudanese SLIFE, an ESL content-area teacher described this dilemma as a major source of anxiety for teachers who "do not know what to do with them [SLIFE] and worry that they are not teaching them the required subject matter" (p. 333).

Alternately, Stodolosky & Grossman (2000) concluded that the teachers who were most likely to adapt their instructional practice to meet changing student needs "[held] a more open, flexible view of their subject…than those who see their subject area as fixed" (p. 131). In her study on adolescent SLIFE's vocabulary acquisition in Science class, Miller (2009) referenced a teacher who demonstrated an adaptive approach to teaching this population: "…sitting there and working with them [SLIFE] entailed a change in his practice, in which he was responsive to where the student was at, rather than where he was in the curriculum or textbook" (p. 588). For this teacher, a pedagogical shift occurred when he became more aware of the assumptions that he had been making regarding SLIFE's comprehension of Science-specific vocabulary. Similarly, Dooley (2009) quotes a teacher as saying "I found myself inventing guided reading "lessons" on the run to deepen comprehension and critical understanding of texts" (p. 13). But, although this teacher's adaptability was admirable, she was acting in isolation without specialized training and lacked the context of a targeted early literacy program informed by initial and ongoing running record assessment.

Dooley's (2009) study, based on interviews with Austrian secondary teachers, was, therefore, a call for alternative programming for SLIFE: "This [increase in adolescent SLIFE population] requires teachers to extend their pedagogical repertoires: subject area teachers must teach language and literacy alongside content; high school teachers must teach what has been thought of as primary school curriculum" (p. 5). Within the Canadian context, Gunderson (2009) echoed this idea in his statement that "students of lower English ability and with less L1 background… must be immersed in a reading program" (p. 49).

**Conclusions**

This review of the literature revealed four barriers that inhibit secondary teachers' willingness and ability to shift their instructional strategies to meet the print literacy needs of SLIFE. These barriers are related to teachers' attitudes about traditional ESL instructional practices, attitudes about their preparedness to teach SLIFE, attitudes about SLIFE and how these attitudes influence pedagogy, and attitudes about their role as educators of SLIFE. In some studies, external barriers, such as a lack of pre-service and ongoing professional development training, left teachers feeling underprepared to address the unique learning needs of SLIFE. Other studies revealed that intrinsic barriers, such as teachers' attitudes about ESL pedagogy, the academic capabilities of SLIFE and their role as an educator, affected their willingness to take on new approaches to instructing SLIFE. In combination, these studies informed my study and research question by contextualizing the professional experiences of my

participant and providing insight into the challenges that she faced when confronted with the same barriers.

In addition, the literature also revealed secondary teachers' urgent need for early literacy programming strategies for SLIFE (Dooley, 2009; Gunderson, 2007, 2009; Kanu, 2008; Montero et al., 2014; A. Thomas, 2007; Woods, 2009). Although a few studies cited pockets of "pedagogical innovation" (Dooley, 2009, p. 8), this was mostly related to individual teachers following their instincts rather than a set plan of instruction. Most significant, however, is the fact that there is an absence of research related to the experiences of secondary ESL/ELD teachers who have shifted their pedagogy to meet the print literacy needs of SLIFE.

## Theoretical Framework

Constructivist, critical, and critical constructivist theories also provided an overarching framework for my research, particularly regarding factors relating to professional knowledge development. Additionally, theories related to Personal Practical Knowledge (PPK) (Clandinin, 1985; Connelly et al., 1997) provided a secondary interpretative framework regarding the impact of prior experiences on teachers' instructional practices. In the following section, I will highlight each of these theoretical frameworks.

### Constructivist Theory

According to traditional constructivist assumptions, knowledge is socially constructed. "Knowers" are, therefore, highly influenced by the historical, social, linguistic and cultural contexts that surround them and shape their individual and

collective worldviews. Within an educational context, constructivists believe that teachers and students are collaborators who co-construct knowledge through their interpersonal relationships. Within the context of education, constructivist principles can be best summarized by Vygotsky's (1987) foundational belief that "[t]hrough others we become ourselves" (p. 127). Vygotsky's sociocultural theory linked the acquisition of knowledge to the use of cultural tools, such as language and print literacy, by teachers and students as they engage together in the learning process. This leads to "situated cognition", or culturally contextualized knowledge development, which has a strong influence on personal belief systems. Hence, in a constructivist-based learning environment, a teacher assumes the role of a facilitator who mediates social learning environments, rather than directing them. They seek to acknowledge and understand students' individual perspectives and the personal schemas that influence their learning. As well, they strive to foster a community of learners in their classrooms by encouraging students to construct meaning through their shared experiences (Schunk, 2012).

Schunk (2012) further explained Vygotsky's sociocultural theory by stating that, "Knowledge is not *imposed* from outside people [e.g., teachers] but rather formed inside them [e.g., students]" (p. 230). Consequently, it is the way in which learners construct knowledge *through* social interaction (as opposed to *from* social interaction), within school environments, that, ultimately, transforms their thinking. This constructivist tenant is related to the reciprocal learning process that transpires between students and educators when they engage in inquiry-based learning. Teachers

working within this framework seek students' points of view by asking questions. This does not imply that such learning only happens within unstructured learning environments. Rather, many educators guided by constructivist principles intentionally and explicitly create and direct learning conditions that are student-centered without inhibiting the autonomy of learners.

Inevitably, however, the instructional tools used by teachers stem from, and are highly influenced by, the cultural norms that exist within schools, school boards and ministries of education. This means that a teacher may foster a constructivist-based learning environment in their classroom but be constrained by systemic barriers. Foundational meanings, such as the role of a teacher and favoured pedagogies, are historically and socially negotiated within the institution of education and are highly influenced by cultural norms (Schunk, 2012).

**Critical Theory**

It is a goal of critical theorists to break through embedded cultural norms that hinder social change in institutions such as education. Educators who follow critical theory ask questions that challenge the status quo and facilitate opportunities to empower marginalized students (Schunk, 2012). Like constructivists, they are guided by responsive teaching methods that validate each student's unique experiences, worldview and identities. Freire's (1999/1970) "banking model", a metaphor for education, is foundational to critical theory. In this model, he asserted that knowledge is not a currency that can be simply deposited, like money, into a student's cognitive "bank". Education, therefore, is not merely a one-way transmission of academic

content from teacher to student. Rather, education should be defined as a reciprocal exchange of ideas between teachers and students that highly values the background experiences and knowledge of students, particularly those who are marginalized and whose identities are not reflected in the cultural norms of school environments.

Teachers guided by critical theory are also driven by a strong sense of advocacy and social justice. They model to their colleagues and students a need to challenge norms and belief systems that hinder equitable practices in education. In "The Silenced Dialogue", Delpit (1988) directly challenged the "culture of power" that exists within classrooms, schools, and educational systems. She asserted that, at these levels, there are codes for participating in education and that these codes are defined by those who hold the power. Further, she suggested that the status quo is, for the most part, unchallenged because those who hold the power are often the least aware of the power that they exert. A link can be made between the influence of Vygotsky's "cultural tools" (e.g., language and print literacy) and the "power codes" described by Delpit. Both are "transmissions of… 'embedded meanings' from teacher to student [that] can only be understood if cultures [have] the same power" (Freire, 2009).

When the codes of educators are not shared or understood by marginalized students, cultural dissonance results and learning is sacrificed. Delpit (1988) asserted that it is very important for dominant groups within schools (i.e., defined by Delpit as liberal, white, middle class teachers) to acknowledge the implicit power that they hold by teaching their codes explicitly to students. She is, therefore, a strong advocate of the need for "skills oriented" teaching for marginalized students rather than "process

oriented" pedagogy. Delpit stated: "…[i]n literacy instruction, explicitness might be equated with direct instruction" (p. 284). The direct instruction of print literacy skills, using instructional models such as guided reading, gives marginalized students the cultural, as well as the linguistic capital, that they require accessing academic content and "mainstream American life" (p. 296). More simply put by one of Delpit's students: "I'm looking for structure, the more formal language" (p. 287).

Delpit qualified her advocacy for a teacher-guided approach by emphasizing that the teacher cannot be the only expert in the classroom. She states that teachers should only "direct the instruction, not the answer [and that] …students have an important voice in their own learning" (p. 288) and should be encouraged to recognize their own "expertness". It is in this vein that Delpit's views align with Freire and Macedo (1998), critical theorists, who believed that "[r]eading the world precedes reading the word" (p. 6). By finding ways to connect lessons to students' background experiences and knowledge, teachers can help them to learn, and make sense, of the power codes and Euro-American cultural norms that are highly embedded in mainstream education.

**Critical Constructivist Theory**

Critical constructivists make an important link between the foundational knowledge that teachers construct, resulting from their professional experiences, and the synthesis of knowledge that evolves from their reflection upon these experiences. Through this type of research, educators "reveal how their own perspectives came to be constructed and how the social values, ideologies and information they encounter

shape their meaning making, pedagogies and world views" (Freire & Macedo, 1998, p. 3). Critical constructivist researchers seek to reveal the power and influence of dominant ideologies within institutions and how they can hinder new knowledge construction. In the field of education, critical constructivists are, therefore, interested in the impact of dominant groups that construct and validate some pedagogies and not others. In response to this power imbalance, they strive to "value knowledges and forms of meaning-making traditionally dismissed by dominant culture and mainstream academics" (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1993). As eloquently stated by Delpit (1988):

> This can only be done … by seeking out those whose perspectives may differ the most, by learning to give their words complete attention, by understanding one's own power, even if that power stems merely from being in the majority, by being unafraid to raise questions about discrimination and voicelessness with people of colour, and to listen, no, to *hear* what they say. (p. 297)

Additionally, critical constructivists are concerned about the role that power plays in research and the resulting construction of knowledge that is validated by dominant group power structures. Regarding educational research, they are interested in how these processes advantage dominant groups that advocate for transmission-based pedagogies and, consequently, constrain other pedagogies. Within a critical constructivist framework, "[r]esearch is constructed when personal experience intersects with academic or lived knowledges" (Steinberg, 2014, p. 3). For example, data collected from interviews with teachers about their teaching practices may "reveal how their own perspectives [as educators] came to be constructed and how

the social values, ideologies and information they encounter shape their meaning making, pedagogies and world views" (p. 3) Whereas in traditional pedagogies there is little rationale for studying relationships between the learner and teacher, critical constructivist theory seeks to question social controls that restrict teacher autonomy. As asserted by Delpit (1988), teachers have a crucial role in advocating for marginalized students such as SLIFE by "pushing gatekeepers" (p. 292) for more equitable teaching practices within schools, as well as empowering students to pursue social justice causes.

**Personal Practical Knowledge**

Clandinin's (1985) theory of Personal Practical Knowledge (PPK) is based on the idea that a teacher's past experiences directly influence their intentions and actions in their current teaching practice. More specifically, PPK is defined by Clandinin as a teacher's "knowledge which is imbued with all experiences that make up a person's being… [including] a person's experiential history, both professional and personal" (p. 369). Connelly, Clandinin and He (1997) extended this theory to include categories that can be applied to narrative and thematic analysis. The two categories that will be referenced in this study are "narrative unity" and "metaphor". "Narrative unities" are described as "threads in people's lives that help account for the way in which they construct the stories that they live both in their personal lives and in their teaching" (p, 671). Metaphors are portrayed as linguistically based images giving "imaginative expression to personal practical knowledge making it possible for a person to explore

hidden intellectual avenues contained in a metaphor's frame" (p. 670) (e.g., teaching is like tending a garden).

PPK, also described by Connelly, Clandinin, and He (1997) as "professional knowledge landscapes" (p. 674), evolves through metacognition. This means that teachers are self-aware and, therefore, able to interpret the connections between their past experiences and present circumstances. Teachers are individuals with unique life narratives that contribute to the development of their professional knowledge base.

# CHAPTER 3

## Methodology

I chose a case study approach for this research study because it involved an in-depth, narrative exploration of one teacher's pedagogical journey teaching SLIFE. In my methodology section, I will outline more specifically why a case study approach was best suited to my study. Next, I will give details about my participant and my procedure to gain her informed consent. Finally, I will outline the qualitative methods that I used for my data collection and analysis, which allowed me to determine my overall findings.

### A Case Study Approach

As defined by Yin (2009), "a case study investigates a contemporary phenomenon … in its real-world context" (p. 2). For this reason, there is a strong history of case studies related to early literacy development within the contexts of home and school environments (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 2008). Prior to the 1990's, case studies of this type focused on single participant or classroom studies involving primary-aged children. They explored the process of *how* a child, or group of children, learned to read and write and the reasons *why* some children struggled more than others with the process of becoming literate (Steinberg, 2014). Beginning in the 1990's, case study research related to early literacy development began to focus on more economically and culturally diverse populations. In addition to the "ideological and social dimensions of literacy" (Yin, 2009, p. 184) related to diverse populations,

comparisons were also made between the influences of home and school on the literacy development of children.

Accompanying these shifts in focus, case study research also evolved beyond exploration and began to include description and explanation of issues related to areas of concern (Barone, 2011). Ballenger (1999), in a dualistic role as both teacher and researcher, conducted a case study that focused on problematic events that occurred when she was teaching early literacy skills to three and four year old Haitian children. At the beginning of her study, she acknowledged that she had deficit thinking regarding the students' ability to respond to her literacy instructional strategies. Subsequently, however, Ballenger reflected on *how* her thinking and practice shifted during her case study to consider each child's strengths and unique backgrounds (Dyson, 1997). A decade later, Ballenger (2009) again used data from her own class, as well as from other classes, to show *how* teachers can "learn, and shift their [instructional] practice, from [i.e., as a result of] puzzling moments" (p. 21) and *why* it is important to make this shift for marginalized populations of students. In more recent years, case studies have been used by researchers, such as Ballenger, to assert that current curricula and teaching practices need to change to meet the needs of more diverse student populations. In particular, they use case studies to argue against a "one-size-fits-all" approach to education (Ballenger, 2009).

Within an educational setting, a case study approach is well suited to an exploration of an individual student or teacher perspective because it requires an intensive investigation of a bounded system (Barone, 2011). This system gives the

researcher the focus needed to do an in-depth description of a case and the latitude to conduct an analysis that can lead to a deep understanding of the case (Genishi & Dyson, 2015). Because of the flexible nature of a case study, a broad research question can be asked, followed by supplementary questions that may arise during the data analysis. This can be likened to the process of peeling an onion, revealing layers of insights that, through a process of inquiry and interpretation, lead the researcher to core understandings about the participant's experiences. Merriam (1988) described this process as "inductive" because the data drives the understandings that emerge during the study.

This inductive process is directly related to the type and coinciding purpose of a case study. For my research study, I conducted a single subject intrinsic case study (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2009) by exploring, describing and offering explanations regarding how a secondary ESL teacher experiences working with SLIFE within an ELD program focused on early literacy instruction. As with Ballenger (2009), I took a critical stance with the intent to improve conditions for learning as they related to a teacher's instructional practices when working with secondary SLIFE. This is a revelatory single subject case study (Creswell, 2013) because, to the knowledge of this researcher, there has not been an in-depth case study conducted with a secondary educator of SLIFE teaching within a formally established early literacy program. This gap in case study research makes this study particularly timely and relevant within the context of many Canadian secondary schools that have experienced a rapid influx of SLIFE, a scenario

that is being replicated internationally in UNHCR resettlement countries such as the USA, UK, Australia, and Canada.

**Participant**

In this study, I focused on one secondary ESL/ELD educator's experiences teaching SLIFE in a secondary school in Ontario with ELD programming. For this in-depth exploration, I requested the participation of a teacher with whom I worked with who fit the criteria that I required to explore my research question. For the purposes of this study, I assigned the pseudonym "Sara" to my participant. At the time of my data collection, Sara had been a secondary teacher for nine years, teaching content-area subjects to mainstream, native English speaking students, as well as ELLs. During those nine years, she taught SLIFE in ELD designated content-area courses, such as Geography and English B/C (traditional ESL model) for five years. Most recently, Sara taught ELD A English (early literacy program) for one year. I chose a participant who was relatively new to teaching an ELD English course because I hoped to learn about her experiences and professional knowledge development while she was "finding her legs" working with SLIFE. I gained informed consent from my participant to participate in this study (see Appendix E) and adhered to the Review Ethics Board (REB) approval process.

**Data Collection**

In the following section, I outline the qualitative research methods used in my study: a) semi structured interviews, b) a researcher diary, and c) research memos.

**Semi-structured interviews.** I documented the participant's experiences working with SLIFE by conducting three in-depth, semi-structured personal interviews. A semi-structured approach to the interviews allowed me to focus my pre-planned inquiries on my central research question, and gave me the flexibility to ask follow-up questions that arose during the interviews. These additional conversational opportunities allowed me to clarify statements made by the participant and probe for deeper understanding during the interviews. This, in turn, gave the participant the latitude to describe scenarios and tell longer stories without being interrupted by the structured, standardized questions of a more formal interview process (Merriam, 1988). A semi-structured approach allowed me to formulate questions based on insights gained from data analysis between interviews. This also gave me the opportunity to listen to my participant with a "third ear" (Anderson & Jack, 1991) during the interviews. As explained by Anderson and Jack, it was my intent to not only "listen" to what my participant is saying, using inductive reasoning to infer the participant's meanings, but also what she omitted from her responses.

Within the context of critical pedagogy framework, I viewed my role as an interviewer to be one of an advocate and partner in the study. Consequently, my study aligns well with Fontana and Frey's (2005) "empathetic approach" to interviewing that makes the following distinction between traditional and newer interview strategies: "Rather than extracting information and diagnosing, interviews have become much more humanized in the wake of social reform" (Riessman, 1993).

The three interviews that I conducted lasted approximately two hours each. These interviews were digitally audio-recorded and transcribed for later analysis. I created an interview guide for each interview with five to eight main questions as well as several prompts for each question (see Appendices B, C, and D). These interview questions were linked to the participant's reflections on her current and past instructional practices as they related to teaching SLIFE. The following steps provided a process and sequence to my interview question formation:

1. Conducted semi-structured interview #1 using overarching and probing questions
2. Transcribed data
3. Analyzed transcribed data
4. Used data to inform question formation for interview #2
5. Conducted semi-structured interview #2
6. Transcribed data
7. Analyzed data
8. Used data to inform question formation for interview #3

**Researcher diary.** In addition to conducting semi-structured interviews, I also wrote my personal thoughts and observations in a "researcher diary" throughout the data collection and data analysis process. In this diary, I recorded my pre-and post-interview observations in anecdotal form. I also used this format to record my reflections and insights during the data analysis process. In doing so, I could

compartmentalize my subjectivities regarding the data, which assisted me with being more aware of my personal biases regarding my research.

**Data Analysis**

Through my analysis of the interview data, combined with my personal reflections and inferences, gained a holistic understanding of my participant's experiences as a teacher of SLIFE. The data that I gathered from the interviews was analyzed during and after the data collection process. For each interview, I followed the following steps:

1. Transcription
2. Member check
3. Coding of data
4. Sorting coded data into themes
5. Thematic analysis

These data analysis strategies are described as follows:

**Transcription.** The central purpose of my interviews was to analyze and better understand my participant's experiences as a teacher of SLIFE though her oral responses, descriptions and personal narratives. I, therefore, used a digital audio recorder to record our interviews. Following each interview, I transcribed the recorded data manually. Proper organization of this data was an important component of the transcription stage so that it was comprehensible for coding (i.e., responses to specific questions and categories of questions, responses to probes, conversation generated independent of specific questions).

**Member Checking.** An important step in my data analysis was a member check following the transcription process. Following each interview, I showed the participant the full transcript and asked her to confirm that the data was correct. She was also given the opportunity to delete or add information from the transcript. This member check process preceded the coding and thematic analysis process and, therefore, did not include adjusting my data interpretation.

**Coding.** Following the transcription stage, I further organized my data into "meaningful segments" (Fontana & Frey, 2005, p. 180) by applying codes to reoccurring evidence. These codes emerged from my data and were not be predetermined. Rather, they were linked to a theoretical framework and/or to literature relating to my area of study. Initially, I followed Creswell's (2013) framework for "lean coding" (p. 184) by dividing my data into a small number of codes (i.e., 5 or 6) and then gradually expanded these codes into more detailed subcategories (i.e., 25-30). The number of responses within a category is sometimes referenced as "an indicator of the participant's interest in a code" (p. 185). But, I have not reported, in my study, on the number of codes in any given area because this is a qualitative study and I have not given codes equal value as with quantitative research. Instead, I viewed these codes as contextually influenced. In addition, I followed Creswell's code-naming processes, which was based on the following principles:

a) What I expect to find before the study;

b) Surprising information that I did not expect to find;

c) Information that is conceptually interesting or unusual to researchers, and participants and researchers. (p. 186)

The next step was to consolidate these codes into approximately five broad themes. As stated by Creswell, these were "broad units of information that consist of several codes aggregated to form a common idea" (p. 186). Creswell compares this consolidation process to the grouping of "children" (coded subcategories) into "families" (overarching themes).

**Thematic Analysis.** I interpreted my data using a thematic analysis approach. As broadly defined by Braun and Clarke (2006), "[t]hematic analysis is a method for identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns (themes) within data" (p. 79). Given that the source of my data was several in-depth interviews, I used thematic analysis to discover themes and concepts that were embedded within these dialogues. My interview questions were open-ended in nature so that they elicited a wide variety of responses and were not designed according to pre-set themes. Additionally, I took an inductive thematic approach to my data analysis, as defined by Braun and Clark, by allowing the development of my codes and themes to be data driven. My analysis was interpreted at a latent level, and I sought to "identify or examine the underlying ideas, assumptions and conceptualizations – and ideologies" (p. 84) that informed and influenced the meaning of my data. Finally, I adapted Creswell's template for his analysis summary of a multiple case study and used it as a guide for summarizing my single case study. This included my: a) case context b) case description c) case theme analysis d) case assertions and generalizations (Creswell, 2013, p. 209). For an example

of how I analyzed the data from raw interview data through its representation, see Appendix F).

# CHAPTER 4

## Findings

My research explored how Sara, a secondary teacher trained in traditional ESL instructional practices, developed her professional knowledge base to work within an ELD program rooted in early literacy pedagogy. My findings will be represented narratively as I trace the chronological progression of Sara's experiences within education, beginning as an elementary and secondary student, followed by her pre-service experiences and culminating with her experiences as an ESL/ELD secondary teacher within traditional and non-traditional pedagogical contexts. I explored Sara's evolution as an educator and how this ultimately led her to develop her professional knowledge base within an ELD program rooted in early literacy pedagogy.

My analysis of the data revealed four thematic categories. These categories are "Conceptions About Self", "Conceptions About SLIFE", "Conceptions About Pedagogy" and "Conceptions About Conditions for Success". These four categories will provide a thematic framework for each period chronicled in the findings. To clarify, the term "conceptions", as used in my data analysis, implies evolving beliefs, understandings, insights and knowledge development that informed Sara's practice, over time. Within the context of this research study, these conceptions are evidence-based as well as rooted in experience and social construction.

**Experiences as a Student (Elementary, Secondary and Post-Secondary)**

In the following section, I will outline findings from my first interview with Sara, which focused on her years as an elementary and secondary student, as well as her pre-service experiences as a student within the Bachelor of Education program.

**Conceptions about self.** As a young girl, Sara knew she was destined to become a teacher someday. She would set up a classroom in her grandmother's walk-in closet, complete with a chalkboard and easel, and proceed to instruct a compliant lineup of stuffed animals. "They were a diverse group of stuffed animals!" Sara adds jokingly, who now teaches adolescent English language learners from a broad range cultural, linguistic and educational backgrounds. Sara enjoyed school as a child and described herself as a studious and "academically-minded" student. She defined her elementary and secondary education as "traditional", since she learned mostly through "teacher-directed" instruction. She believed that this instructional style suited her as a student because she "learned easily", and didn't require individualized instruction to succeed academically.

Sara attended an elementary school with a student population that was economically and culturally diverse. Consequently, many of her friends were born outside of Canada and/or had cultural backgrounds very different from her own. While Sara was born and raised in the same southern Ontario city where she taught, her peers were from home countries such as Romania, Laos, Vietnam and the Philippines. Yet, despite their cultural and linguistic differences, these friendships felt "very natural" and contributed directly to Sara's pride and personal belief in the value of

multiculturalism in Canadian society. “I think that [my beliefs] … stem from my group of friends being a hodgepodge of different cultures and backgrounds… this is how it is and no one should have more of a right to education than another.” Sara also felt passionately about the right of all citizens to “feel safe and build a life [in Canada]”, a belief that she attributed to these childhood friendships with children of refugee background who were forced to flee dangerous circumstances in their home countries.

Years later as an ESL/ELD teacher, when Sara felt intimidated about teaching students from diverse backgrounds, these childhood friendships would become touchstones of familiarity. When she lacked confidence in her ability to relate to SLIFE, she would tell herself; “I’ve done this before”. These relationships, as well as her experiences teaching SLIFE, also allowed Sara to look beyond her personal lens; “You know, growing up in only one city in Canada, you get a very small window of life experience and … I’ve learned [about] the different things that other people go through in their lives and how much it can influence their learning and so much else about them”.

**Conceptions about SLIFE.** As an elementary-aged student, Sara described herself as a “friend to all” and believed that one should “stand up for your friends” if they are being bullied or treated unjustly because of cultural or racial differences. But mostly, she recalled these childhood friendships as “natural” because “they were just friends…. I didn’t really see them as being different … they just had different [prior] experiences.”

As a secondary and post-secondary student, Sara gained a broader awareness of SLIFEs background experiences, and the potential impact of these experiences on their learning. After she graduated from high school, she volunteered in an ESL/ELD classroom at the same school that she had attended as a student. When she observed a teacher mentor who taught ELLs and some SLIFE, Sara recalled being impressed that she challenged the students intellectually, regardless of their limited English and literacy skills. She admired that the teacher had "high expectations for [all students]; not assuming they couldn't do it". Sara's experiences as a high achieving student had evolved into a desire to become an educator who would deliver academically stimulating information related to a content-area subject. For this reason, she was pleasantly surprised by the ability of these ELLs to learn new concepts quickly when immersed in a learning environment that supported their learning needs. Sara attributed the academic success of these students to the teacher's "high expectations" and to "not assuming that they couldn't do it". When asked about instructional strategies, Sara recalled that the teacher found different ways to challenge the students so that "they could understand the content and be engaged in the class". Consequently, this volunteer experience with a teacher mentor that she admired sparked Sara's initial interest in teaching ELLs and SLIFE.

**Conceptions about pedagogy.** Several of Sara's secondary teachers had a significant influence on the kind of teacher she would become. She recalled how their personal qualities helped her to develop a relationship with them that, ultimately, made her feel more connected to what she they were teaching. Sara explained how

these personal qualities were grounded in a passion for their discipline which was, in turn, passed on to her; “I found the ones (teachers) that I really connected with the most… loved the subject area that they taught and were passionate about that”. Sara referenced one teacher who was a “firecracker” who sparked her interest in Geography and motivated her to become a Geography teacher years later. Of equal influence, however, were the personal character traits of some teachers, apart from the discipline that they taught. “I gravitated towards teachers that were laid back and liked to have fun and I think that comes out in my teaching style”. In fact, the teachers that she admired most, and would later emulate as an ESL/ELD teacher, were the ones with “that relaxed attitude… being on the same level as the students [and] learning from each other”.

Sara believed that her relationships with key teachers were fundamental to her personal growth and engagement as a student. They helped her to build confidence and a sense of self-worth because they took the time to “understand the student[s] as a whole”. These teachers extended their relationships with students beyond course content and treated them as individuals; “When you have a teacher that you know is in it 100%, you feel like they value you in the classroom and you feel happy to be there”. As a result, Sara later formed friendships with some of her high school teachers, who have, in turn, supported her throughout her teaching career. Key to these evolving teacher/student relationships, according to Sara, was their camaraderie… “a learning partnership [in a which] … you weren’t the only person learning… your teacher was learning too”. Also, implicit to these relationships was the bonding that occurred when

teachers and students experienced successes and challenges while co-learning; “You tried different things [together] and you had good days and bad days. So, it made you feel more comfortable that way.” As a student, therefore, Sara believed that her reciprocal relationships with teachers directly contributed to feeling more comfortable learning in their classrooms as opposed to her experiences in classrooms with more traditional, “top down” teacher/student dynamics.

Several years later, when Sara was volunteering in a Geography class with SLIFE, she noted that the teacher often adapted her lesson plans using a trial and error approach. If the students didn’t respond well to her planned strategy, she would try another or, likely, several more different approaches. Although Sara admired this teacher’s flexibility, there is sense of ambiguity in her recount; “If you had *an idea* where they were at, it was good to try things… to kind of get *a sense* of really where their comfort level was”. Her awareness that the SLIFE in this classroom required responsive instructional strategies seemed tempered by a sense of randomness when selecting alternative strategies (as opposed to having a targeted, informed “back-up” plan). As recalled by Sara; “I know there was a lot of just trying things and sometimes saying ‘Oh well, we can’t do this or you can handle this so let’s go with it!’”

As a Bachelor of Education student, Sara further extended her belief that good teachers are flexible and that lesson plans are only a starting point that should be adapted according to the needs of students. Sara’s recollection of her typical thought process while teaching illustrates this point; “Ok, this is what your plan is. Now, you have to modify it and change things… so that they can learn in your class”. This desire

for greater latitude in instructional practices is accompanied by her belief in the importance of experiential learning. Referencing her practicum teaching experiences, she stated: “You learn so much on the ground, so I don’t know how much you can learn as a teaching candidate before you actually get in there and do it.” But, when reflecting upon her practicum experiences, she was quick to add that she would have benefited, as well, from more theoretical and field specific knowledge (e.g., the distinction between ESL and ELD programs and the early literacy needs of SLIFE). Sara stated that it was “a bit of a shock” later, when she was teaching SLIFE, because she has very little background knowledge about these students. It was her practical experiences as a volunteer that she would later draw upon to compensate for the lack of theoretical knowledge that she received about SLIFE from her pre-service education.

In addition to Sara’s evolving pedagogical beliefs regarding the importance of practical experience verses theoretical knowledge, she was also receiving conflicting messages regarding pedagogical focus (i.e., curriculum-centred vs. student-centred). She described her training from teacher’s college as being focused on “the teaching part of it” (i.e., how to teach academic content). Whereas, her ESL/ELD Additional Qualifications (AQ) course focused more on learning about students and their profiles (i.e., linguistics, cultural, socio-economic, access to education, etc.) and how this impacts the instructional needs of ELLs. Like her mentor, Sara was drawn to education as a profession because of her passion for teaching Geography as a content-area subject. But, the student-centered focus of her AQ ESL/ELD course led her to realize

that her childhood friendships and experiences as a volunteer were directly relevant to teaching Geography, English or any other content area to SLIFE.

This led her to shift from an interest in teaching subject-related content *to* SLIFE to a desire to understand, work *with* and advocate for this marginalized population of students. Driven by her core belief that education should be made accessible to all, Sara began to view relationship building as an essential component of teaching and advocacy, particularly when working with SLIFE:

> Learning about individuals [SLIFE] and getting to know them and then talking about their stories with others. People are kind of blown away when you start telling them about experiences that they've been through and how well they're doing and that they can be successful.

When she opened herself up to learning about her students' backstories, Sara began to envision possibilities rather than limitations regarding how to best teach SLIFE. She began to view learning as a reciprocal relationship, leading her to say to her students "You teach me so much and I can't even compare to the sorts of things you've been through because my like experiences have been so different."

**Conceptions about conditions for success.** For Sara, making connections with students and colleagues was foundational to her vision and growth as an educator. In addition to the teachers that mentored her as a student and volunteer, Sara also discussed the influence of her relationships with colleagues in her pre-service and AQ courses:

> I feel like my teaching is a piece of everyone else. I've encountered other teachers and said 'Oh, I like that' and I take that part of it and so it's like a puzzle of different pieces from the different teachers that I've worked with in the past.

She referred to these courses as "stepping stones" that provided vital opportunities for collaboration and provided her with a starting point as a new teacher. Since then, she believed that her pedagogy has further "evolved and changed" because of her varied relationships and resulting experiences within education.

When asked what kind of relationships create the best conditions for her professional learning, Sara's response was consistent with her puzzle and stepping stone metaphors: "Collaboration… when it's a community and working together." She recounts an "Ah Ha!" moment while reading a professional article in which teaching ELLs is described being, fundamentally, about social interaction. "I never thought of it as social interaction but it totally is… mutually learning from each other and working towards a goal." For Sara, a vital condition for success for teachers and students is a system that allows for, and encourages, social interaction at all levels… during pre-service and AQ courses, between teaching colleagues and between teachers and students.

**Experiences as a Teacher of SLIFE within a Traditional ESL Pedagogical Context**

In the following section, I will outline findings from my second interview with Sara, which focused on her years as a teacher of SLIFE within a traditional ESL pedagogical context.

**Conceptions about self.** As a new teacher, Sara was excited to be teaching Geography, a subject that she was passionate about. When asked what she considered to be her main role when she began teaching this subject, Sara responded, "I felt like curriculum… delivering curriculum… was my basis for the courses that I was teaching… and just getting through everything." Later, when some SLIFE were enrolled in her ESL Geography and English courses, she began to feel conflicted regarding her need to cover content and the students' inability to keep up. "I felt like we were rushing a lot through things that we could be spending more time on… But, we had to get through it and move on to something else." There was also a lack of clarity regarding the students' level of comprehension and learning "Whether they were being successful as they could be… I don't know." Propelled by her belief that "curriculum was the driving force", Sara and some of her colleagues felt pressured to move on to the next topic, even when she doubted that SLIFE were ready; "I felt like we [teachers] were getting through a lot but they weren't [SLIFE]."

Sara recalled that, as a student, her preference was to learn individually. She disliked group work because she felt that the work distribution was unequal and that she was often asked to do more than her share. She remembered feeling frustrated and a lack of control when group members failed to "pull their weight". As well, Sara was most comfortable within classrooms with traditional teacher and student roles. Consequently, when Sara first began teaching SLIFE in a secondary ESL Geography course, she gravitated towards a whole class, teacher-directed style of teaching:

> In terms of delivering content… I was directing it. I thought it was better for me because I could make sure that students were understanding… ask questions or check with students and just gauge things to see how they were doing.

But, although her teacher-led approach stemmed from a desire to gain more control over SLIFE's learning, Sara often felt powerless because of her uncertainty about their instructional needs. She had a vague awareness of her students' broad range of language and literacy needs but she didn't know how to assist them. Although Sara was knowledgeable about her chosen subject area (Geography), she believed that she was uninformed regarding the unique learning needs of SLIFE. This, in turn, undermined her confidence as an educator; "I think there was a bit of ignorance at that point because it was all new to me. So, I became more aware as I met these students and got to know… [their] different experiences and levels of schooling and literacy. But, I don't think I had that going in". This sense of ambiguity was compounded when Sara began teaching a new subject, ELD English, to SLIFE:

> I didn't have a background or understand the pedagogy of teaching English… I didn't have the necessary understanding of the students and their low literacy levels and how to address those needs. I didn't know what I was doing in the beginning. I had to kind of learn it as I went.

Even though Sara took pre-service and AQ courses specific to ELLs, she did not feel adequately informed regarding the differences between ESL and ELD programs. Consequently, she did not know how to differentiate instruction for SLIFE, as opposed to ELLs with uninterrupted schooling. She experienced feelings of apprehension and

anxiety and about teaching the ELD English course because she was “concerned about her skill background [not being sufficient] …to deliver what she needed to do”. As a result, when she taught the first few ELD English courses, Sara “relied very heavily on materials coming from other teachers”. When asked about the instructional strategies that she used, Sara’s responses were content-related (e.g., grammar or short story units) rather than about her teaching practices. But, while Sara struggled to gather resources suitable for teaching SLIFE in her ELD English class, she turned to the students themselves as a direct resource. “They were really a mystery to me initially. A lot of what I learned about them was from the students”. Reminiscent of her experiences as a student and volunteer, this relationship building felt comfortable for Sara and she gradually became more relaxed and confident in her role as an English ELD teacher. Her belief in the importance of learning about her students’ background experiences, and her willingness to actively seek this information and use it to guide her instruction, allowed her to shift her focus from being a teacher of a subject to a teacher of students.

As a high achieving student, Sara was goal-oriented and, consequently, she sometimes felt frustrated when SLIFE would get “stuck in one spot” and were unable to advance successfully through the course requirements. But, when this happened, she took ownership for the situation and spoke openly with her students; “I was very up front with them and told them that I was still new at this… I would say ‘I get it. You’re not understanding. Let’s try it differently tomorrow.’” Sara had resorted to this trial

and error approach before because she had learned, as a volunteer, that educators need to be flexible when teaching SLIFE.

Also, a problem-solver by nature, Sara reflected upon questions such as "Why is this student not progressing? What's missing? What are they missing? What am I missing? What could I do to help them?" She was troubled by the incongruence that existed between the course requirements and her students' ability to meet those requirements. Inevitably, her frustration led to some self-doubt and Sara began to question her ability to teach SLIFE; "I think in those early years I was a lot harder on myself than they were on me… I would think 'Am I teaching this right?'" But, it was Sara's strong sense of responsibility to her students and her adaptable nature that gradually led her to shift her instructional focus from meeting course requirements to meeting student needs. For Sara, this pedagogical shift began with letting her students' take the lead by asking them what they needed. By listening to their stories of trauma and survival, Sara found that she could connect with SLIFE by providing them with "emotional support". By "identifying with them", Sara could slow down her pace and reassure her students "that sometimes things take longer to get to the same point but [they would] get there."

**Conceptions about SLIFE.** At the beginning of her teaching career, Sara used her personal connections with SLIFE to compensate for her lack of understanding about their pedagogical needs. During these early years, she described her classroom atmosphere as relaxed and fun, which she attributes to her willingness to be open about her own learning process. When "I told them [that] I'm learning too… I found

[out] how patient these students are… and forgiving". Sara recalled a sense of being "in it together" both in their mutual recognition that they were all learning, but also that they were bound by a sense of frustration that the students were not making academic progress through traditional ESL pedagogy. As stated by Sara, "I know that there were students that felt frustrated because neither they or I could figure out ways to help them and they weren't feeling like they were getting their needs met in the classes". Sara also noticed that SLIFE would compare themselves to other ELLs in her classes with age-appropriate literacy skills. They would ask questions such as "This student is new to Canada too but how come they're doing so much better?"

Despite the SLIFE's frustration due to their lack of academic progress, Sara recalled that they, generally, had a very positive attitude towards learning because they were "…going to school for the first time, … craving every experience and just wanting to be there and learn and appreciating that they were getting an opportunity that they had never had before". But, interestingly, this made Sara feel even more unsettled because she couldn't attribute SLIFE's academic stagnation to a lack of motivation.

Sara also remembers SLIFE who were completely unaware of the multiple layers of literacy. She was surprised that she had to "rein in" some early emergent readers who appeared "over-confident" in their abilities and would say "You know, Miss, now I know how to read!" Often, they would express frustration because "they were feeling that they should be at a higher level (of reading)." In such cases, Sara realized that SLIFE were decoding text without understanding what they had read; "So, I remember

a light bulb going on… and thinking… 'Alright, some of these students can speak [English] and 'read', but they are not comprehending and able to give it back'." At this stage, Sara was hopeful that SLIFE's stronger oral English proficiency would compensate for their low literacy skills, which she thought, would eventually "catch up". But, she also worried that their oral English proficiency "would mask their difficulties", particularly in content-area classes where teachers were often unaware of SLIFE's lack of literacy competencies. In her Geography class, Sara adapted her program by allowing SLIFE to share personal information and knowledge through oral rather than written responses (e.g., a resume that became an oral interview). Sara describes these program accommodations as "changing the *way* you did things… [but] still doing the same things." But, there were times when Sara believed that by changing her expectations, she was lowering her expectations of SLIFE. She recalled checking in with another Geography teacher who was teaching the same course but did not have SLIFE in his class. After their conversations, Sara realized that they were going at a "completely different pace than the other classes" and that it was "almost a little bit of a joke".

Although easygoing and adaptable by nature, Sara began to realize that SLIFE had unique instructional needs that she was unable to address through accommodations alone. She recalled some students being unable to copy notes from a screen and wondering why they found this difficult while other students did not. This led to many more questions related to SLIFE's learning needs such as "What was their

foundation? What did we know about them? What could I reasonably expect them to do? … Why were they struggling and what could I do for them?"

**Conceptions about pedagogy.** It became increasingly apparent to Sara that there was a limit to the effectiveness of accommodations for SLIFE within ESL and mainstream courses. When she first taught an ELD B/C English course, and was assigned an educational assistant, she began to differentiate her instruction by informally grouping her students according to "who was getting it [the course content] and who was not". Sara was surprised by the SLIFE's wide range of language and, particularly, literacy abilities within her class; "You didn't have a commonality between students even though they were in the same course… some students were getting what you were doing… and others were really struggling." But, although Sara was teaching an ELD rather than an ESL course, her impression was that it should resemble the traditional ESL program model; "I thought of it as kind of one and the same… I feel like they (ESL and ELD English courses) were structured in a similar way. You just had different students in front of you. Maybe they had different needs and you'd have to adapt things"

This incongruence between a singular program model and divergent student needs became the underpinning of Sara's struggle to make a square peg fit in a round hole during her early years of teaching ELD English. Despite differentiating her instruction, Sara continued to be confined by a traditional program model and course expectations what were unattainable for most of her students. One of Sara's biggest

quandaries centered on assessing students' academic success within this pedagogical framework:

> …the biggest challenge for those courses was when it came to the end and making decisions about whether they would move on from there. I had a lot of trouble feeling confident in making those decisions because everyone had worked really hard. Did that mean they should move on?

According to Sara, this ambiguous situation led her, and other teachers of SLIFE, to make subjective, rather than evidence-based decisions, that "automatically move[d] along" SLIFE to the next course, even though they had not reached curriculum expectations. As a result, "there was a feeling of [some] students being misplaced in the course levels… They may have progressed individually but not in terms of the course expectations."

Sara described her instructional practices during this time as a combination of whole group instruction and group work led by her and an educational assistant. When she was new to teaching English, she believed that the course content should be "compartmentalized into separate units":

> I felt, because it was a unit of study, it was ok to do things in isolation. But, it was difficult to put the pieces together. When you stepped away from it, if you left the grammar [unit] for a while, and then came back to it later on, it wasn't there for the students or they couldn't apply it because it [content knowledge] was very isolated that way.

Realizing that SLIFE were not learning and retaining new information, Sara began to question her abilities as a teacher and asked herself: “Am I teaching this right?” But, she also pondered how she could adjust her instructional strategies to better meet the needs of her students and questioned, “How am I going to teach this so that it sticks?”

Gradually, Sara began to shift her focus towards student readiness. Instead of revisiting a teaching point multiple times with the hope of “making it stick”, she began to “instinctually gauge” what students were ready to learn. She was more selective about what she taught, despite the curriculum requirements. She realized that more time and explanation did not always make new information comprehensible for SLIFE. Sara recalled doing a novel study unit in her ELD B/C course on a book called “The Breadwinner”, which was also being studied in ESL courses of a similar level: “I remember spending weeks and weeks on it and, at the end of the book, realizing that there were students that had no idea what the story was about and did not retain any of it.” It was similar with self-selected silent reading activities. Sara found that after reading, students were unable to respond to basic questions about characters and plot. Looking back, she describes both events as “eye-opener experiences.”

Sara began to have conversations with her colleagues about the differences in students’ needs in ESL verses ELD programs; “We talked about that at the end of the school year… about not just teaching [SLIFE] Geography or English. We’re teaching [how to do] ‘school’.” She continued to focus her instruction on “the essential things they needed to learn” and began to look more closely at reasons why SLIFE were struggling within a traditional ESL model. She noticed issues with notebook

organization that “went beyond regular teenager stuff” and that vocabulary acquisition was a deeper need than learning new English words. In her Geography class, for example, Sara realized that SLIFE were often learning conceptual knowledge alongside new vocabulary, in addition to acquiring basic literacy skills for the first time. As a result, they were struggling with the course content because the cognitive load was too great.

This spurred a desire in Sara to “reinvent it [her pedagogy] and make it suit [SLIFE] and give them what they needed in a course.” She abandoned the ESL Geography textbook and began to create her own modified resources. In her ELD English class; she recalled trying a demonstration, formative assessment, and summative assessment approach to essay writing. She thought that by having multiple opportunities to observe and practice a new skill, they would eventually learn it. Although some students were successful with this approach, many were not. Sara also recalled that a lack of resources limited her teaching options in the ELD English class, with a stack of National Geographic magazines as her only independent reading texts. But, for Sara, the issues went far beyond the ineffectiveness of accommodations or a lack of resources. She was beginning to question the appropriateness of courses that were offered to SLIFE:

> Why are students [SLIFE] in this class? Why were they placed in this class?...They’re not ready for this class and… whether it was Career Studies or another course… feeling like I’m not understanding how the whole process

works… the decision making. It wasn't benefitting them [SLIFE] because they were being placed in a course [that] wasn't really the right fit for them.

**Conceptions about conditions for success.** Although these pivotal questions would eventually become "stepping stones" towards change, Sara was, at this point in time, faced with many systemic constraints. She was teaching within a traditional ESL program model, which she believed did not meet SLIFE's instructional needs. Nevertheless, she was expected to advance their learning and course completion. Frustrated, Sara turned to things that she could control within her classroom. Influenced by her strong bonds with past teachers, she focused on relationship building with her students. In her ELD Geography class, she sought opportunities to talk about similarities and differences between countries, using themes such as landforms and climate. For example, by asking SLIFE to compare the mountains in Canada and Somalia, Sara found that she could make learning more meaningful than through a more traditional ESL Geography unit that focused exclusively on Canadian content. As expressed by Sara, "I found that as soon as you tap into their experiences and knowledge, they could make connections." Furthermore, Sara believed that the content taught in Geography made learning more accessible because it is something all SLIFE have experience with in their everyday lives and it is, therefore, "not something completely unreachable".

Sara found it more difficult, however, to make these connections in her ELD English class. She viewed the subject content was more abstract and she struggled to find opportunities to relate grammar lessons to SLIFE's personal experiences. Also, the

lack of appropriate-leveled reading materials made the course content even more inaccessible. Sara was also unfamiliar with the course content since it was not one of her pre-service areas of focus. Consequently, she felt “less confident… and not as relaxed in the English class”. When asked how her apprehension affected her connection with SLIFE in this setting, Sara reflected; “The kids could totally read it. When you’re trying to deliver something that you’re not completely comfortable with yourself, they call you on it…” As a result, Sara took a “we’re in this together” approach by confessing to her students that she was inexperienced with teaching English and was learning alongside them. She also recalled feeling like this when she first taught ESL Geography and was amazed by the “forgiving and understanding” nature of the SLIFE in her class.

New learning conditions were beginning to emerge in Sara’s classes, prompted by her desire to connect personally with SLIFE who were often not relating to the curriculum. Although she initially believed that the subject of English was inaccessible for SLIFE, Sara found ways for the students to share about themselves through speaking, reading, and writing activities. As explained by Sara, “Whereas in Geography you use the content to drive the conversations, you have the students in English. It [the English language] becomes a tool for them to communicate and… “talk” more about themselves as individuals.” Sara recalled the impact on her, as an educator, when a student who told her stories about her life in a Kenyan refugee camp, “It blew me away just having conversations with her… different students as they got more of a literacy background, they would… start putting things in their writing that gave you more

insight into who they are". But, when Sara was asked how this sharing usually occurred with SLIFE, she clarified that it was mostly through "oral conversations."

It was also necessary, at this time, for Sara to turn to colleagues for assistance. There were only a few other teachers who had experience teaching ELD-specific English courses, and each taught a different leveled course. Collaboration between Sara and these teachers involved informal, one-on-one meetings or "on the fly" check-ins. ELD-specific instructional strategies also were not usually discussed at ESL/ELD department meetings and, as a result, a distinct program plan was not in place. Instead, Sara described the progression from one ELD course to another as "linear", in which teachers were responsible for moving SLIFE from "one [course] to another, as opposed to working… more as a group". She further elaborated that, "… the ideas and the connections that you had with other teachers would be about… where they [SLIFE] were coming from in the course before [and] where they were going to in the course after", with the suggestion that the focus was on course requirements, not student ability levels. Conversely, when asked about the conditions for learning during those early years of teaching ELD English, Sara simply reflected; "It didn't feel like a program."

**Experiences as a Teacher of SLIFE within an ELD Early Literacy Program**

In the following section, I will outline findings from my third interview with Sara, which focused on her year as a teacher of SLIFE within an ELD early literacy program.

**Conceptions about self.** According to Sara, the absence of a separate ELD program for SLIFE (distinct from the traditional ESL model) created a sense of ambiguity for teachers and students. From her perspective, there was a lack of clarity for teachers regarding instructional and assessment strategies that were appropriate for SLIFE. For students with limited school experiences, there was a lack of understanding about the language and literacy skills that they required to move from one course to another. Although Sara had done her best to make connections and build relationships with SLIFE, she often had an overwhelming feeling that she was unable to address their unique learning needs. She now understood that SLIFE's main barrier to academic achievement was their low print literacy skills but felt restricted by an educational system that did not offer a program that could address this crucial need.

Consequently, it was with cautious optimism Sara agreed, along with a small group of her colleagues, to teach an exclusively ELD A English course, rooted in early-literacy pedagogy, and specifically designed to address the unique instructional needs of SLIFE. Initially, Sara was somewhat overwhelmed by the steep learning curve because her training and teaching began simultaneously; "I felt like it was a lot of learning on the go… Sometimes we didn't get enough time to digest what we were learning and take a look at the big picture". Hence, in the short term, Sara described the transition from a traditional ESL to early literacy framework as a bit frenetic, with the biggest challenge being "trying to keep up with all of that (professional development) and taking time to reflect and think about what [I was] learning". But, as

she began to apply her newly acquired early literacy practices, Sara gradually started to "get a clearer picture of the students' skills". This increased sense of clarity that had a positive effect on her self-efficacy as a teacher of SLIFE. As stated by Sara, "…the program has given me more confidence in what I do… just feeling like I have a better understanding of [ELI] strategies". Additionally, Sara identified student progress in early literacy skills as becoming a key motivator for her as an educator:

> I've seen the rewards from my students. I'm seeing them progress so then it comes back and gives me more confidence in my teaching… When they come out of the program and move on to higher levels, you feel better about what you're doing as a teacher… because what we're doing is meeting their [SLIFE's] needs and the students are being successful.

Sara also believed that her increased confidence enabled her to her make deeper connections with her students and other teachers. This is significant since Sara cited the importance of relationship building as a core belief throughout her experiences in education. Sara referenced her use of the Running Record assessment tool to specifically discuss reading strategies with SLIFE:

> … what I like most is how it gives me more of an understanding of the students… and what blows me away is *how much* I now know about each student… in the traditional whole class situation a student, who was a bit of a mystery to you, would slide under the radar.

Sara explained that there are several benefits to having this knowledge. Firstly, it allowed her to share this information with SLIFE so that they may better understand

how to improve their skills. Additionally, it gave her the tools and knowledge to advocate for SLIFE by sharing information that would allow these students to be more successful in content-area courses. Overall, Sara summarized that teaching SLIFE within the context of an early literacy program has made her "the most confident I've ever been in my teaching because I can explain it to others…I can contribute to the team of teachers… and [to the] program to make it better."

**Conceptions about SLIFE.** As Sara's self-efficacy grew within the new ELD program so, too, did her students' confidence in their language and literacy abilities. A key component of the ELD early literacy program is to place students in small groups according to their reading levels. During small group Guided Reading instruction, Sara noticed that SLIFE were far more engaged in discussions about the books because they understood what they were reading. In contrast to their lack of understanding during the whole class novel study referenced earlier, Sara's students were now "able to comprehend what they're reading and talk about their understanding of what they're reading". By matching text to student's instructional reading levels, Sara believed that there was a "two-fold" effect; "It's amazing that, once you … meet them [SLIFE] where they're at… they come out with all this understanding and then they get more confident because they are able to do that." SLIFE who were previously quiet and withdrawn while learning in the whole class instructional model, were now actively interacting with the teacher, and each other, during small group discussions.

Sara also noticed that, with SLIFE's increased understanding and confidence, came the ability to better articulate previously acquired knowledge and experiences.

She recalled how SLIFE could make meaningful connections while reading a text about water sources; “Some of the young men from Burma talked about travelling during the rainy season to the mountain streams and collecting the fresh water and another student from Somalia said that it was his job to… take the jerry can to the well every morning.” When asked about the impact that personal connections had on these students, Sara explained that they helped them to contextualize their learning by “bringing it back to their experiences.” When they encountered new vocabulary and concepts in a guided reading text, they could relate it, in some way, to a familiar experience in their lives. Sara contrasted this to the isolated grammar lessons that she often taught in the traditional ESL program and her own experiences as a student learning French:

> I think of even myself learning French as a second language and a lot of it didn’t stick because you would learn how to conjugate verbs and do all of these things but it was out of context. So, we didn’t really learn the language… We were just learning the structure of the language.

In addition, Sara also believed that when SLIFE were encouraged to make connections to book topics, during Guided Reading lessons, they viewed the new learning as more personally relevant and identity affirming.

Sara made direct links between her students’ self-efficacy and their increasing awareness of their level on the literacy continuum. She explained this by stating, “… the students are now able to articulate their strengths and weaknesses. They can recognize what things they’re working on, what things they’re struggling with and then

hone in on what they need to improve on". This is in stark contrast to the sense of ambiguity that Sara and her students felt within the traditional ESL framework. Sara acknowledged that some students were initially confused about the ELD program changes and wanted to go back to their "normal class". But, after a while, she observed that "they started to see their successes and their progression through the program and that we were meeting their needs. Then, there was a better comfort level and understanding that this was the right thing for them". For students newer to Canada, who had not been in the traditional program, Sara viewed the ELD Early Literacy program as "a good way for them to ease into school and to feel safe, and not as vulnerable, in the small groups". Overall, Sara believed that the ELD Early Literacy Program gave SLIFE a sense of empowerment regarding their literacy development; "They can definitely drive their own learning because they know where and how to improve". She acknowledged that this sometimes led SLIFE to overestimate their reading abilities, but was pleased that the program gave her the tools she needed to specifically discuss achievement and learning goals with students.

More often, however, Sara's students exceeded her expectations within the program. In the past, she had been "inspired" by her students and believed that they had the "potential" to close their language and literacy gaps. But, Sara was surprised when she saw how quickly they progressed through the reading levels after receiving targeted guided reading instruction: "I knew they were capable of doing it but I think what astonished me was how fast it could happen!" Sara also attributed the increase in student reading levels to the flexibility of the reading groups: "What's nice about the

program is that they [SLIFE] can be moved, at any time, into a new group that meets their new needs." As a result, she explained, individual students read increasingly complex text, and learned new reading strategies, when they are personally ready. Sara believed that this component of the program was highly motivating for SLIFE; "… the kids really appreciate that (being moved to a higher level group when ready) because they want to show you what they're able to do… and they get so excited!" She felt that this motivation and engagement was crucial because it led to SLIFE taking ownership, and becoming more invested, in their own learning. Referring to SLIFE who progressed to higher leveled ELD English courses, Sara was effusive; "It's so amazing to see them reading on their own and then able to talk about the book independently because you've had the big picture experience with them. You knew they'd get here and, because of that possibility, they *can* get to the point where they can do it on their own!"

**Conceptions about pedagogy.** The change from a traditional ESL framework to an ELD program, rooted in early literacy pedagogy, not only encouraged SLIFE to assume a more autonomous role in the classroom but also shifted the teacher's role. For Sara, this involved a certain degree of "letting go" of control, as she transitioned from a whole class, teacher-directed, content-focused approach to student-centered and data-driven small group instruction. This did not mean that her role as a teacher was diminished in the new program, but rather that there was a reciprocal learning dynamic between Sara and her students.

Sara credited this new dynamic to her increased understanding of the early literacy abilities of individuals and groups of students. Using a Running Record assessment tool, that specifically identified student reading levels and behaviours, Sara and her colleagues could "group students with similar needs and abilities [so that] they could work at their own pace and work together to improve specific skills". She contrasted this approach to whole class instruction when you "focus on something and there might be five or more (students) that don't need it or aren't ready for it. So, they just kind of miss out".

Using individual and group literacy profiles, Sara inverted her pedagogical practices so that they were driven by the instructional needs of SLIFE rather than by course requirements. As explained by Sara:

> I think my teaching role has become more about understanding the whole student and discovering where they are at in terms of literacy and then building a program around them. So, it has changed from being a deliverer of curriculum to learning about the student first… We now fit the student into an achievement chart [based on] where they are at now…as opposed to where they are expected to be according to the curriculum.

For Sara, this approach required some "backward mapping" when pre-planning courses while also remaining flexible and responsive to student needs as they arise during lessons. But, as Sara pointed out, SLIFE's academic needs extended beyond language, literacy and conceptual knowledge development:

> We're not just teaching English or Geography. We're teaching them social skills, school skills and life skills… In Geography class, I was spending a whole class looking at their timetables and figuring out where their classes were. So, we did an activity where they had to find all their classes on a map of the school…And so, just recognizing the skills that they need as students, and as newcomers with limited schooling…and then finding a way that the course can help them do that. So, I guess that's understanding the whole student… and all that they need as individuals.

As an educator, Sara believed that this shift in focus "created a higher level of comfort and clarity because… the students in front of you are in the right place… you're going to run the course for them and not try to fit them into a course". This contrasted with Sara's recollections about teaching SLIFE within the traditional ESL model: "… I had the course all set up (prior to the first class) and all the students had to fit into the course." In that setting, Sara often felt obligated to move forward with covering content when students weren't ready "because you feel you have to". But, despite the expectations within that model, she believed in "teaching students until they understand what they are doing" and adjusted her pacing accordingly before moving on to the next level of instruction.

According to Sara, the guided reading small group instruction was foundational to the ELD Early Literacy Program because it kept her attuned to the evolving instructional needs of SLIFE. In addition to information gathered from Running Record assessment data, Sara also believed that her teaching practices are informed by the

opportunities that small group instruction provided to observe and receive feedback from students:

> … because they are reading at a more appropriate level, they are able to do that (comprehend and discuss text), whereas before they couldn't articulate their (literacy) needs". Sara also believed that by partnering two classes of a similar level (e.g., two ELD A classes), SLIFE benefited greatly from working with two teachers (as well as with educational assistants, peer tutors and volunteers) as they rotated through a series of literacy centres. When asked why this format was beneficial to SLIFE, Sara stated that it created a "community feel" and a sense that all participants are "taking care of one another." From the perspective of SLIFE, Sara added: "I think that's what they really appreciate… that the program is designed to meet their needs and that… we're doing things to help them, not despite them.

According to Sara, small group Guided Reading instruction led to responsive teaching practices. This was because SLIFE were working within an "instructional zone" that was optimal for learning to read. Sara also believed that SLIFE could learn content information while they were learning to read. She related this directly to the selection of age-appropriate texts for adolescent students (e.g., non-fiction books that paralleled content-area topics and fiction books with more mature themes). When discussing the importance of book topics, Sara recalled SLIFE learning literacy skills and content information simultaneously and offered a sample conversation with her students during a guided reading lesson; "Alright, we now understand the vocabulary and…

structure of the book. Let's use it to talk about our own experiences and how they connect to the content."

Sara explained that certain book topics could also help SLIFE to engage in discussions that related to their personal experiences. She recalled a book about vehicles that led to a discussion about imbalances in power between the employees and employers within certain occupations (e.g., a chauffeur and passenger). To Sara's surprise, several Rohingya students, who had not been permitted equitable job opportunities in Burma, initiated this discussion. While reading a book about a yard sale, students who had been forced to flee Syria without personal belongings linked the sale of a child's beloved teddy bear to "the things… and people that they left behind in their country." While reflecting upon these discussions, Sara stated; "…it's so interesting how they perceive…the book that you're reading or the things that you're discussing." When students interpret book topics through their personal lenses, Sara suggested that it became more than a reading lesson. These "deeper discussions" opened the door to sharing students' trauma and identity stories.

**Conceptions about conditions for success.** According to Sara, changes to the structure of the ELD program at her school created ideal conditions for the professional and academic growth of ELD English teachers and SLIFE. When Sara began teaching SLIFE, within the ELD Early Literacy Program, all ELD English teachers received a range of ongoing professional development opportunities. ELD department meetings were held regularly and were facilitated by an ESL/ELD Department Head and an ESL/ELD Consultant. A portion of these meetings was reserved for early literacy pedagogy

training, which was conducted by an ESL/ELD Early Literacy Resource Teacher. In addition, these meetings included discussions about program format and planning, scheduling, student groupings and assessment, as well as opportunities for general knowledge sharing and visioning between the team of ELD English teachers. These teachers had a range of training and experiences instructing SLIFE and a few, who were previously trained in an ELD Early Literacy Pilot Program, acted as mentors for Sara and other teachers.

Sara described the formal training sessions as opportunities to "go into detail [learning early literacy strategies] …and to bring in some specific comments and questions to discuss". She also valued "collaboration with outside sources [e.g., a university-based researcher] because they back up what we're doing." Sara believed that these professional development opportunities included a good balance of new skills training and pedagogical reflection: "We look at different kinds of statistics [e.g., running record reading assessment data] and big picture things… concepts related to what we're doing and how it works and why it works." A key component of the reflective piece was having formal and informal discussions, with all stakeholders, about the program, teaching strategies and the instructional needs of students. In addition to these discussions, Sara referenced the value of "hallway conversations between classes and at lunch… We'll kind of throw back and forth different things in… little mini explosions of conversation". For Sara, these formal and informal opportunities to debrief and collaborate with her ELD colleagues were vital to the success of the ELD program; "It's huge! I don't think it's possible without a team of

teachers… collaboration is so important because you see different things from different students… we collaborate in terms of assessment and planning… I think a program like this cannot work in isolation."

Sara acknowledged that it was sometimes challenging to learn new instructional strategies at the same time as applying them to her daily teaching practice. But, she gradually realized that there were many advantages to blending theory with practice:

> I think with [early literacy] training, there's only so much you can appreciate and learn beforehand. Until you're in it, you don't have examples, you don't have context for what you're learning and then a lot of it just goes over your head and it doesn't sink in. [But], when you stop, periodically, to reflect and learn and to gain new strategies, it gives you that chance to say 'Oh, okay, I get that' and I can see that in the context of… what I'm doing with my [guided reading] groups.

Sara quickly became more comfortable with "learning by doing" because she was now a part of a community of learners with a common goal to help SLIFE to acquire print literacy skills while learning to speak English. She attributed this unique dynamic to a dispersal of leadership roles so that "we learn from each other [and] are each experts in different ways." This contrasted with how Sara perceived the leadership structure of other subject departments within her school. Her remarks suggested that this was because all teachers worked within the same program

framework and contributed in some way to the continued development of the program:

> …we're working as a team of people that are all doing similar things and we each feel like we come together with lots of things to contribute. So…there's not one person directing everything but things are directed by our students' needs and… there's a lot of freedom to try different things and bring different perspectives to the table.

Interestingly, Sara recognized that SLIFE benefitted from a similar group dynamic within the ELD Early Literacy Program. As previously mentioned, a central component of this program was small group instruction, based primarily on students' reading levels. Although these small groups were created to address SLIFE's early literacy instructional needs, they fostered learning conditions that were ideal for students' emotional wellbeing, as well, as their academic development. Sara noticed that "…within the small groups [SLIFE] feel safe and so there's a more trusting relationship between peers… and also between students and teachers." She explained that this trust led to relationship building, collaboration, risk-taking and, ultimately, greater student engagement: "They're definitely more engaged because they feel more safe and less vulnerable and so they're more willing [to participate]." Like her experience working with the ELD teachers, Sara observed that the students "[felt] like they were on the same team and that they [could] work together to learn new things". Also, she thought that small group instruction created a learning condition that particularly benefited shy and withdrawn students: "They don't feel intimidated…

We've seen students that felt very shy… and unwilling to speak up. Now, as soon as they're with peers at a similar reading level, they light up and say 'Oh, I'll help you with that!"

In summary, Sara believed that teachers and SLIFE mutually benefitted from the ELD Early Literacy Program by gaining a strong sense of efficacy. She attributed this to a balance of formal/informal instruction models and theoretical/experiential learning opportunities, as well as a collaborative leadership dynamic and small group instruction model that combined to fully engage teachers and students in a common goal.

# CHAPTER 5

## Discussion

The findings in this study indicate that Sara's professional knowledge base, as a secondary ELD English teacher, was influenced by many factors that transpired throughout her journey as a student and educator. Her conceptions about self, SLIFE, pedagogy and conditions for success shifted significantly from her early experiences as a secondary and pre-service student to her professional experiences as a teacher of SLIFE. To reiterate, the term "conceptions", as used in my analysis and interpretation of the data, implies evolving beliefs, understandings, insights and knowledge development that informed Sara's practice, over time. Within the context of this research study, these conceptions are evidence-based as well as rooted in experience and social construction. As with my findings, my discussion will align with the chronological sequence of Sara's personal and professional experiences, including her years as an ELD teacher informed by traditional ESL pedagogy, as well as a teacher of SLIFE working within an ELD program rooted in early literacy pedagogy. Within this timeline, I will discuss several themes that emerged from the findings, including key factors that influenced Sara's conceptions, over time, and contributed to her professional knowledge base. I will then link these themes, when applicable, to the barriers outlined in my literature review, as well as to my overarching theoretical framework of critical constructivism. This analysis has revealed many common threads that connect the identified themes. Although I will present my ideas within thematic

categories, an interweaving of these categories will be necessary to achieve a full and rich discussion.

**Personal Practical Knowledge**

During her early years as an educator, Sara felt uncertain about how to address the instructional needs of SLIFE and struggled to find answers within a traditional ESL instructional framework. She felt anxious when SLIFE had difficulty learning the course content, which, in turn, eroded her self-efficacy as a teacher. Similarly, teachers in Stodolsky and Grossman's (2000) study, whose "issues of student diversity intersect[ed] with concerns about subject matter" (p. 127), experienced similar frustrations. There are also parallels to Walker-Dalhouse and Dalhouse's (2009) study, in which an ESL content-area teacher of Sudanese youth attributed her feelings of anxiety to "not know[ing] what to do with them [SLIFE] and worry[ing] that they are not teaching them the required subject matter" (p. 333). Sara believed that the traditional ESL instructional model did not meet the needs of SLIFE and, therefore, began to rely on her past experiences as a child, student, volunteer and teacher-in-training to inform her professional practice.

For Sara, these experiences contributed to a blend of "personal practical knowledge" (PPK) that guided her as she searched for authentic and meaningful ways to connect with SLIFE. As previously defined, PPK is a teacher's "knowledge which is imbued with all experiences that make up a person's being… [including] a person's experiential history, both professional and personal" (Clandinin, 1985, p. 362). Throughout her life, Sara had strived to foster authentic relationships with her peers,

colleagues and students. Consequently, when Sara lacked clarity regarding best practices for instructing SLIFE, she looked for insights from her PPK. She recalled the personal connections that she made with SLIFE during her volunteer and pre-service years. The PPK that she gained from these experiences (i.e., learning about SLIFE's refugee experiences, exposure to trauma and lack of formal education) helped her to contextualize her students' academic struggles (i.e., lack of print literacy skills). Although she felt restricted by traditional ESL pedagogy, Sara used her PPK to inform her teaching practices and began to make changes that were within her control. She told herself: "I've done this before" and focused on building relationships with her students, as she had in the past. Gradually, Sara gained her students' trust and, as she stated, "learned [about] the different things that other people go through in their lives and how much it can influence their learning."

Clandinin (1985) described PPK as a form of self-awareness that enables teachers to interpret and personalize their current teaching practice: "Teachers do make a difference. They do know their situations. They are not mere screens who translate others' intentions and ideologies into practice" (p. 674). This prompts the question of whether PPK, rooted in reciprocity, better equips teachers to address SLIFE's unique learning needs. The findings suggest that Sara's PPK directly assisted her with establishing relationships with SLIFE and these relationships laid the foundation for her future paradigm shift. Stewart (2012) asserted that teachers "who take the time to personally connect with the student and who exhibit perseverance, patience and kindness" (Montero et al., 2014), are most likely to adapt their pedagogy to meet

SLIFE's academic needs (e.g., print literacy skills). As well, Stodolsky and Grossman (2000) cited a "personalized approach" (p. 166) with marginalized students as a necessary prerequisite for teachers to make changes to their instructional practice.

Sara's PPK led her to empathize with SLIFE by acknowledging their prior experiences. From her early years of teaching, Sara showed an interest into SLIFE's life stories, which she viewed as windows to understanding the "whole student." Because of her PPK, Sara began to adjust the way she taught Geography curricula, providing opportunities for SLIFE to connect knowledge about their home countries and cultures to new learning about Canada. Sara discovered that when SLIFE were given these opportunities, learning became more accessible: "I found that as soon as you tap into their experiences and knowledge, they could make connections." Just as Sara's PPK informed her teaching practice so, too, did her students begin to contextualize their learning by "bringing it back to their experiences."

The impact of Sara's PPK on her teaching practice with SLIFE aligns with Freire and Macedo's (1998) assertion that "reading the world precedes reading the word" (p. 6). Because of her PPK, Sara began to consider the importance of the practical knowledge that her students acquired prior to attending school. She discovered that her students learned skills while in refugee camps that could be applied to academic contexts. It was at this point that Sara's conceptions about pedagogy made a critical shift from focusing on the teaching of course content to letting SLIFE inform and guide her instruction. This was significant considering the body of research that indicates that many educators are reluctant to shift their practice from traditional ESL pedagogy

(Dooley, 2009) to meet the print literacy needs of SLIFE. Although many secondary ESL/ELD educators acknowledge these needs, they believe that their primary role and responsibility is to "deliver the curriculum" (as stated by Sara) and prepare students for future education, despite their lack of academic readiness to learn that content. Notwithstanding these systemic barriers, Sara continued to look to her students for answers, and asked questions such as "What [is] their foundation?" and "What [do] we know about them?" to make their learning more accessible and comprehensible.

**Data-Informed Pedagogy**

Accompanying many ESL educators' belief in content-driven pedagogy, is an assumption of age-appropriate first language literacy regarding SLIFE (Kanu, 2008; Stodolsky & Grossman, 2000; Woods, 2009). However, SLIFE lack age-appropriate print literacy skills in their dominant language and English. Despite being highly motivated to learn, Sara noticed that SLIFE fell far behind students with age-appropriate literacy skills, resulting in low overall academic achievement. She recalled some of her students, who were acutely aware of their struggles with acquiring literacy, and stated "I know that there were students that felt frustrated because neither they or I could figure out ways to help them and they weren't feeling like they were getting their needs met". Research indicates that this situation is common and problematic since adolescent SLIFE are at a higher risk of attrition than students without gaps in their schooling (Gunderson, 2006). But, as Sara established relationships with SLIFE, she became more aware of how their experiences as refugees had directly impacted their literacy competencies. This prompted her to seek the missing pieces of her pedagogical

puzzle by asking questions such as: “Why is this student not progressing? and What’s missing?” Over time, Sara’s questioning expanded to: “What [can] we reasonably expect them to do?” and “What could I do to help them?” suggesting the need for educators to determine what SLIFE already know (regarding print literacy skills), to better align expectations with their learning needs.

Recognizing SLIFE’s vulnerability, Sara was increasingly uncomfortable with the ambiguity surrounding SLIFE’s levels of literacy and readiness to progress to the next course. At times, she felt that she was “instinctually gauging” SLIFE’s reading and writing abilities and was concerned that their stronger oral language proficiency “mask[ed] their difficulties”. Lacking an assessment tool to determine literacy levels, Sara felt that she needed to make subjective, rather than evidence-based, decisions when assigning credits: “I had a lot of trouble feeling confident in making those decisions because everyone had worked really hard. Did that mean they should move on?”

Coinciding with this time of uncertainty, Sara began professional development training with a small group of ELD English teachers. Her school had become the sole magnet site for an ELD program that would focus on targeted early literacy instruction for SLIFE. This program was modeled after a pilot initiative that was conducted at a school within the same school board and was documented in Montero, Newmaster and Ledger’s (Gunderson, 2009; 2014; W. P. Thomas & Collier, 1997) research study. The starting point of the training was to learn about an early reading assessment tool called a “Running Record”. This assessment tool enabled teachers to identify individual

student's instructional reading level, as well as their reading skills and behaviours. For Sara, the addition of this assessment tool to her knowledge base was pivotal because it specifically identified where SLIFE were at on the literacy continuum. When discussing the benefits of the Running Record assessment tool, Sara said: "What I like most is how it gives me more of an understanding of the students… in the traditional, whole class situation, a student – who was a bit of a mystery to you – would slide under the radar."

The need for data-informed pedagogy is echoed by Stewart (2012), whose interviews with teachers of SLIFE "suggested that a lack of information about refugee students, combined with inadequate (professional development) support,… contributed to counterproductive attitudes" (Montero et al., 2014) toward students. Stewart explains that these "counterproductive attitudes" are often related to the underestimation of SLIFE's academic capabilities. Conversely, the clarity that Sara gained from data-driven pedagogy, led her to have an asset-based perspective of SLIFE's developing reading skills within the early literacy program: "I knew they were capable of doing it but I think what astonished me was how fast it could happen!" In addition to referencing her students' prior knowledge, running record data provided Sara with critical information that she required to advance SLIFE's literacy skills. It gave her detailed information about individual student's reading capabilities and allowed her to group students according to their reading abilities and literacy needs.

**Student-Centred Pedagogy**

Kanu (2008) attributed teacher reluctance to "re-conceptualize and change their practice" for SLIFE to, among other factors, their "views about how students

learn" (p. 923) . She discussed the need for a "broader vision that encompasses multifaceted teaching goals and beliefs about subject matter and students" (p. 926). Sara credited the running record assessment tool with giving her a better understanding of SLIFE's literacy needs. But, when she learned through professional development how to use this data to inform her guided reading practice she felt a sense a sense of commitment and "buy-in" to the ELD early literacy program, which she contrasted to the traditional ESL model that "didn't feel like a program at all." Sara described this traditional model as "linear", suggesting a hierarchical structure between teachers and students, subjects and students, as well as between entry and higher leveled ELD courses.

But, for Sara, the student-centred pedagogy of the ELD early literacy program created a holistic "big picture experience" for teachers and SLIFE. Running Record data informed her Guided Reading instruction and other small group literacy activities and allowed her to be responsive to individual and group learning needs. She observed SLIFE to be highly motivated and engaged in the learning process, which increased her self-efficacy as a teacher. Most notably, her students were rapidly becoming more proficient readers. Rather than program remediation, this ELD program transformed "primary school curriculum" (Dooley, 2009) into an early literacy program model that met the needs of secondary SLIFE. Sara believed that this "holistic" program allowed her to better support the "whole student… and all they need as individuals" and helped them to realize their full academic potential. Her willingness to adapt to this dramatically different way of teaching paralleled Stodolsky and Grossman's (2000)

study, in which "a flexible conception of subject matter… and high expectations for student learning" (p. 166) were identified as two key characteristics of teachers who made paradigm shifts in their instructional practices with SLIFE.

Sara's adoption of student-centred pedagogy reinforced her desire to move away from a subject focused, teacher-directed traditional approach to teaching ESL. This required a paradigm shift that followed a "What-How-Who sequence" (What subject-specific content and accompanying learning strategies will be taught? How will it be taught? Who will it be delivered to? to a "Who-How-What sequence" (Who are the students? How will I meet their learning needs? What strategies and content will I teach them while meeting their needs?). To elaborate, Running Record data, combined with insights gained from SLIFE's PPK, gave Sara an understanding of who the SLIFE were in her class. This information then enabled her to plan how she would address their learning needs by creating small groups of students, with similar reading levels and profiles. Finally, she would determine what reading strategies and content, within the context of a book, these students were ready to learn through guided reading instruction.

Sara was prompted, early on, by her experiences teaching SLIFE to shift from teacher-directed to student-centred pedagogy. This shift was solidified, and her instructional strategies expanded, when she transitioned into the early literacy ELD program. Her belief that the traditional ESL instructional model did not adequately address SLIFE's complex needs is echoed in the literature (Dooley, 2009; Kanu, 2008; Woods, 2009). Dooley concluded from her interviews with secondary SLIFE and their

parents and teachers that “Every teacher of [SLIFE] needs to be a teacher not only of language… but also of literacy” (p. 16).

**Learning Through Social Interaction**

In this section I will discuss how Sara learned through social interaction while collaborating with colleagues and teaching SLIFE.

**Learning with colleagues.** The establishment of an ELD early literacy program meant that Sara now had the opportunity to collaborate, on a regular basis, with a group of ELD English teachers (including the department head), an ELD early literacy resource/specialist teacher, an ESL/ELD consultant, as well as a support team of educational assistants, peer tutors and volunteers. In contrast to the traditional ESL course, which Sara described previously as linear, meant that teachers were assigned to teaching ELD courses and there was little collaboration regarding instructional strategies and assessment. Whereas, the ELD early literacy program had overarching structures and goals for all courses and groups of teachers collaborated regularly regarding programming and student achievement. As described by Sara: “I had the support of a team around me and [I liked] not feeling like I was doing it on my own… It’s easier to take a leap when someone is holding your hand.”

This team dynamic also gave Sara the opportunity to share her knowledge regarding SLIFE with her colleagues, which contributed to her self-efficacy as an educator. With an increased sense of clarity regarding SLIFE’s instructional needs, Sara described herself as “the most confident I’ve ever been in my teaching (career) because I can explain it to others…contribute to the team of (ELD) teachers… and to

the program to make it better". When asked about the benefits of working with a team of teachers, Sara praised the "community feel" and as noted ealier, commented on the value of the diversity of expertise of each community member. She also explained that times of reflection and knowledge sharing occurred with her colleagues on both a formal and informal basis. According to Sara, the most important aspect of this collaboration was the shared leadership dynamic, which led to the co-construction of knowledge based on a shared goal of student success. As she stated, … "there's not one person directing everything but, [instead], things are directed by our students' needs… I think a program like this cannot work in isolation".

Sara's reflections indicated that she felt better equipped to teach SLIFE within the ELD early literacy program because she could develop her knowledge base through reciprocal learning relationships with her colleagues. This is in contrast to the teacher interviewed by Dooley (2009), who independently "invent[ed] guided reading 'lessons' on the run" (p. 13) without having the opportunity to plan, discuss and reflect upon these strategies with colleagues. This illustrates the difference between using reactive, as opposed to proactive, instructional strategies with SLIFE. For Sara, the ELD early literacy program brought a sense of focus and common purpose to a team of teachers that had usually functioned in isolation in the past. The program created an opportunity for Sara to expand her professional knowledge base and, in the true spirit of collaboration, she credited her colleagues for this learning: "I feel like my teaching is a piece of everyone else… it's like a puzzle of different pieces from different teachers that I've worked with". Interestingly, there are echoes, in this statement, of Vygotsky's

(1987) foundational constructivist tenant: “Though others we become ourselves” (p. 10).

**Learning with students.** As with other aspects of Sara’s professional experiences, her collaboration with ELD teachers paralleled her relationships with SLIFE. During her early years teaching SLIFE, Sara told her students when they were struggling to learn new skills that they were “in it together.” Later, when she became a teacher within the ELD early literacy program, Sara discovered that small group guided reading instruction provided ideal conditions for reciprocal learning between teachers and students. Using the Guided Reading text topic as an anchor, Sara and SLIFE engaged in “deep discussions” about a variety of topics that connected their personal practical knowledge. According to Vygotsky’s sociocultural theory, these authentic conversations served to culturally contextualize knowledge development for SLIFE, leading to “situated cognition” through the acquisition and use of “cultural tools” such as language and literacy (Schunk, 2012). In essence, Sara’s students were learning new concepts while learning how to read through small group guided reading discussions and instruction.

Sara now viewed herself as a facilitator, who sought to foster a community of learners who co-constructed meaning through these shared learning experiences (Schunk, 2012, pp. 240-243). In collaboration with the ELD team of teachers, she adopted what Stewart (2012) referred to as “intensive and flexible programming that meet[s] the unique needs of each student” (Montero et al., 2014). This shift to a reciprocal learning model was a big leap from when Sara “disliked group work” as a

student and preferred to “deliver content… [to] make sure the students were understanding it” as a new teacher of SLIFE. Freire’s (1999/1970) “banking model” , merging constructivism with critical theory, is a metaphor for Sara’s pedagogical shift. She evolved beyond transmission-based pedagogy and embraced a data-informed, student-centered instructional program model that encouraged the reciprocal exchange of ideas between teacher and students. In response to this new program model, Sara discovered that SLIFE, many who were previously quiet and withdrawn, were engaged and highly motivated to learn.

When SLIFE questioned the role of the limousine driver in a Guided Reading text about “vehicles”, a discussion followed regarding the status and societal positioning of different occupations. Because of the persecution endured by Sara’s students, as a result of their Rohingya heritage (i.e., Muslim minority group in Burma), they viewed the limousine driver as being forced into a subservient role. Sara had not considered this perspective during the planning of her lesson, which focused on types of vehicles, but, nonetheless, a follow-up discussion about social justice issues led to the co-construction of knowledge. By establishing targeted but flexible learning conditions within a small group, Sara could engage in a trust-based, open dialogue with SLIFE that was instructive, identity affirming and empowering.

**Social Justice Perspective**

From the beginning of Sara’s professional journey, there was evidence that her beliefs were rooted in critical constructivism. When reflecting upon core beliefs that were consistent throughout her life, she stated that “No one should have more of a

right to education than another". She added that it is the right of all citizens to "feel safe and build a life (in Canada)." In addition to her social justice perspective, many of Sara's statements indicate high expectations for students, even when SLIFE struggled to succeed academically in her classroom. For example, Sara demonstrated asset-based "beliefs about student capability" (Kanu, 2008, p. 926) when she said that she was "inspired" by SLIFE's adaptability, determination and "potential" to learn. According to Stodolsky and Grossman (2000), these core beliefs set Sara up for success within the ELD early literacy program since they were key characteristics of teachers in their study who experienced paradigm shifts. Rather than ask these students to fit a predetermined mold, Sara believed that teachers have a responsibility to make education equitable and accessible for SLIFE.

Critical theorist, Delpit (1988), asserted that there is a "culture of power" in educational institutions that defines the pedagogical status quo. She believed that systemic conditions exist that empower dominant culture students and marginalize minority students. From Sara's perspective, the traditional ESL model of teaching ELLs was based on systemic ideology that did not meet the unique instructional needs of SLIFE and, therefore, disempowered them. According to Delpit, educators must make education accessible to all by teaching marginalized students (e.g., SLIFE) the "power codes" that are known, and used exclusively, by the dominant culture. In the context of this research study, the "power code" required by SLIFE is print literacy. But, since the traditional ESL model focused mainly on additional language instruction, SLIFE were not given access to direct literacy instruction.

Sara believed that the explicit teaching of print literacy skills within a flexible, student-centered program, increased SLIFE's self-efficacy and led them to be more empowered, autonomous learners. Stated simply by Sara, "[Now] [t]hey can drive their own learning because they know where and how to improve." In The Silenced Dialogue, Delpit (1988) explained that it is necessary to provide marginalized students with explicit "skills oriented" instruction in order to give them the cultural capital needed to access academic content in formal educational settings and equip them to meet societal expectations (e.g., finding employment). Delpit clarified that explicit or "direct teaching" was not the same as teacher-directed teaching. She believed strongly that "students have an important voice in their own learning" (p. 288) and that their "expertness" should be recognized, echoing Sara's reference to the influence of "mini-experts" on her professional learning.

Finally, for Sara, being a participant in this research study also contributed to the development of her professional knowledge base. She stated that the process of being interviewed provided her with "time to reflect and think about what you're doing." This parallels the link that critical constructivists make between the knowledge that teachers construct through their professional experiences and the consolidation of this knowledge that evolves through reflection upon those experiences (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1993). Upon reflection, Sara realized that her knowledge and beliefs were co-constructed, over time, through her social interaction with SLIFE. As she shifted from teacher-directed to student-centered pedagogy, she evolved from a "do what I

say" instructional model to a "*hear* what they say" (Delpit, 1988) approach to being a teacher of SLIFE.

As the number of adolescent SLIFE continue to increase rapidly in resettlement countries worldwide, secondary educators are looking for instructional strategies that will effectively address the significant print literacy gaps of these students. A growing body of research has identified the need for targeted interventions for SLIFE that focus on early literacy instruction (Dooley, 2009). Yet, many educators that teach SLIFE are reluctant to shift their pedagogy from tradition ESL pedagogy (Dooley, 2009; Gunderson, 2007, 2009; Montero et al., 2014; A. Thomas, 2007; Woods, 2009). But, the stakes are high, considering that adolescent SLIFE are at a high risk of attrition (Gunderson, 2006; Kanu, 2008; Woods, 2009) and have limited time before they will "age-out" of high school. Although, as stated by Woods (2009), there is a "basic lack of productive models of early literacy pedagogy" (p. 10) for SLIFE at the secondary level, it is imperative that educators reference any documentation of programs of this type, such as Montero, Newmaster and Ledger's (2014) study. Although every situation is different, research based on existing early literacy program models may be adapted to meet the needs of school boards with varying populations of SLIFE (e.g., numbers of students per class and per school, students' entry levels of literacy in dominant language and English).

In this study, an ELD teacher (Sara) shifted her pedagogy from a traditional ESL framework to an early literacy model to meet the instructional needs of SLIFE. This shift occurred because of a gradual evolution in her beliefs (rooted in experience and

professional knowledge). The findings also indicate that optimal conditions were required to support Sara's transition, suggesting that ELD English teachers must be well positioned, by ministries of education, school boards, consultants and school administrators, for success. In sum, ELD educators' internal beliefs about pedagogy must be transformed, as well as external conditions, in order for them to adopt and feel a commitment to addressing the unique learning needs of SLIFE.

## Implications and Recommendations

It is my hope that the findings of this study will be used to advocate for educational policies that will better support conditions for educators of adolescent SLIFE. By providing teachers with optimum conditions for success, they will be more likely to shift their pedagogy to meet the print literacy needs of SLIFE.

The following are recommendations, based on the findings of this study, that are intended to support such changes for educators, and stake holders at all levels, with the implementation of early literacy programs for adolescent SLIFE.

ELD secondary teachers need opportunities for the following, preferably within a program structure that supports early literacy development:

1. Professional development in early literacy instruction, ideally from an ELD Early Literacy Resource Teacher;
2. Collaboration with other ELD teachers within an early literacy program framework regarding program planning, instructional strategies and the assessment of students (including regularly scheduled ELD department meetings);

3. Collaboration with school administrators, department heads, and guidance counsellors, regarding ways to support ELD early literacy programs (i.e., staffing, timetabling, allocation of time and occasional teacher coverage for professional development, allocation of space and necessary requirements for classroom set-up and resources);
4. Collaborative professional development among Secondary and Elementary Teachers working with SLIFE;
5. Collaboration with ESL/ELD learning consultants, early literacy/primary division consultants, and superintendents;
6. Collaboration with Ministry of Education regarding the need for early literacy instruction to be reflected more explicitly in ELD curriculum and;
7. Collaboration with secondary content-area teachers of SLIFE.

**Limitations**

This case study offers a small window into how an ELD teacher developed her professional knowledge base, over time, to work in an ELD early literacy program. The findings of this study are not generalizable because they are tied to one teacher's unique professional experiences; however naturalistic generalizations can be made. This teacher worked for a school board that had experienced a high influx of SLIFE in a short period of time. Consequently, there were enough SLIFE at one magnet-site high school to warrant the creation of an ELD Early Literacy Program. A previously conducted pilot program, within the same school board, also informed the creation of this expanded program. As well, there was a strong sense of urgency and motivation,

at all levels of educators and administration, to pursue ways to close the print literacy gaps of SLIFE. Although the development of this program occurred over time, a significant amount of resources (e.g., age-appropriate levelled texts) need to be purchased and budgets allocated to support this program at the board level. For these reasons, educators working for school boards with smaller populations of SLIFE may not be able to directly relate to this teacher's experiences and the conditions that supported her.

## Future Research

The findings of this study provide a window into the professional experiences of a secondary ELD teacher as she shifted from a traditional ESL model of teaching to adopting early literacy pedagogy designed to meet the print literacy needs of SLIFE. The data revealed five key factors that impacted the teacher's conceptions of self, SLIFE, pedagogy and conditions for success, as she transitioned to a new instructional paradigm. These factors centred around her use of personal practical knowledge, data-informed pedagogy, student-centred pedagogy, learning through social interaction, and a social justice perspective.

Although there has been some research conducted relating to the print literacy needs of SLIFE, and limited research related to the impact of early literacy instructional strategies on the reading achievement of SLIFE, this study is unique in its focus on the professional experiences of a teacher. The existing research points to a sense of urgency regarding the instructional needs of this marginalized and highly vulnerable population of adolescent students. But, more insight is needed regarding the intrinsic and extrinsic factors that motivate and empower teachers of SLIFE to shift their teaching practices from subject focussed to student-centred pedagogy. As revealed in the literature, and the findings of this study, models of best practice and teacher training alone are not the only contributors to professional knowledge development and are not enough to precipitate teacher "buy-in" to new ways of teaching.

The findings of this research study would be enriched by a comparative case study, similar to Stodolsky and Grossman's (2000) interviews of four educators of SLIFE.

This would provide further insight into factors that lead some teachers to shift their practice and others to maintain the status quo. More evidence could also be gathered by conducting a comparative study between ELD teachers working within a traditional ESL framework and those teaching within an early literacy program. As well, a comparison study between school boards conducting early literacy instruction for SLIFE, within different program structures, could shed light on the type of conditions that best support secondary ELD teachers. Such research would provide valuable insight into the impact of ELD early literacy programs on both teachers and SLIFE. This would allow educators to "push gatekeepers" (Delpit, 1988) at all levels to provide equitable educational opportunities for SLIFE.

# APPENDICES

## Appendix A: Glossary

**Additional Qualifications (AQ) Course(s):**

Courses that engage teachers in "a wide range of learning activities that help members expand their knowledge, increase their skills and prepare for career changes… The additional qualifications listed on a teacher's Certificate of Qualification and Registration are one way of demonstrating their dedication to teaching." (Ontario College of Teachers, 2017)

**Asylum seeker:**

A person who is forced to flee their home country, because of mass violence, disaster and/or human rights violations, and seeks refuge in a nearby country but does not have official refugee status.

**Adolescent:**

Broadly defined by the World Health Organizations as youth between the ages of 10 and 24 years, including the three age ranges 10-14, 15-19 and 20-24. This spectrum accounts for cultural differences regarding how adolescence is defined (e.g., beginning with onset of puberty and ending with adult rights such as "age of majority") (World Health Organization, 1986).

**Cognitive Academic Language Learning Approach (CALLA):**

The CALLA is an instructional model that was designed for English language learners in English as a Second Language programs to prepare them to participate in content-area mainstream instruction (Chamot & O'Malley, 1994, 1996).

**Collectivist vs. individualistic orientations:**

A paradigm that stems from Hofstede and Hofestede's (2001) broader cultural dimensions theory. This paradigm is related to the degree that individuals within a society are integrated into groups, as well as how much they are influenced by group beliefs, perspectives and schemas.

**Collectivist culture:**

A society in which individuals are integrated into groups and are influenced by group beliefs, perspectives and schemas (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2001).

**Content-based ESL program:**

Secondary school English as a Second Language programs that focus on content-specific subject areas (e.g., Mathematics, Science, Geography).

**Content-area course or class:**

A course that focuses on a specific subject area of study that may, or may not, be specifically designed for English language learners.

**Cultural Dissonance:**

A mismatch of expectations and assumptions that occurs when the cultural orientations of two or more groups intersect within one society.

**Dominant language:**

The language a person considers to be their strongest (i.e., the language that they can speak, read and write the most proficiently). The dominant language is not necessarily a person's first language.

**Levels of Dominant Language Print Literacy (Florez & Terrill, 2003)**

- Pre-Literate: the dominant language does not yet have a writing system
- Non-Literate: the dominant language has a written form, but the ELL does not have literacy
- Semi-Literate: the ELL has minimal literacy in their dominant language

**Early literacy instructional methods:**

Instructional methods that target the teaching of emergent understandings of how printed text is organized, used and how it works (Pinnell & Fountas, 2011).

**ELLs with limited prior schooling:**

English language learners with limited prior schooling come to Ontario schools from a variety of life situations and experiences. While their individual circumstances are unique, they have not had the opportunity to attend school on a regular and consistent basis or may have had limited opportunities to develop age-appropriate language and literacy skills [in English] and even in their first language" (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2008, p. 6).

**ESL/ELD secondary school magnet sites:**

Secondary schools within Ontario school boards that offer specific courses for English language learners in ESL and ELD programs (i.e., English and content-area subjects).

**ELD Magnet Site:**

A secondary school(s) designated within an Ontario school board to provide separate and distinct ELD programming for students with limited or interrupted formal education (SLIFE).

**English language learners (ELLs):**

"… students in provincially funded English language schools whose first language is a language other than English, or is a variety of English that is significantly different from the variety used for instruction in Ontario's schools, and who may require focused educational supports to assist them in attaining proficiency in English. These students may be Canadian born or recently arrived from other countries. They come from diverse backgrounds and school experiences, and have a wide variety of strengths and needs" (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 9).

**ESL/ELD Programs:**

Models for servicing English language learners while they acquire English language skills (e.g., integrated, sheltered, "pull-out"/withdrawal), traditional, content-focused etc.).

**English Literacy Development (ELD):**

"ELD programs… are for students whose first language is other than English or is a variety of English significantly different from that used for instruction in Ontario schools. Students in these programs are most often from countries in which their access to education has been limited, and they have had limited opportunities to develop language and literacy skills in any language. Schooling in their countries of origin has been inconsistent, disrupted, or even completely unavailable throughout the years that these children would otherwise have been in school. As a result, they arrive in Ontario schools with significant gaps in their education" (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 22).

**English as a Second Language (ESL):**

"ESL programs… are for students whose first language is other than English or is a variety of English significantly different from that used for instruction in Ontario schools. Students in these programs have had educational opportunities to develop age-appropriate first-language literacy skills" (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 22).

**ESL pull-out:**

When Ells are withdrawn from mainstream, content-area instruction with native English speakers to participate in a traditional ESL thematic language program.

**ELD language credit courses (ELD A, B, C, D, and E):**

In 2008, the Ontario Ministry of Education created five ELD courses that SLIFE are required to complete before progressing to ESL courses. These courses span from the most beginner (ELD A) to the most advanced level (ELD E).

**Funds of knowledge:**

A theory developed by Moll, Amanti, Neff, and Gonzalez (1992) that is based on the premise that people develop their knowledge and competencies over time through their life experiences.

**Guided reading:**

As defined by Fountas and Pinnell (1996): "Guided Reading is a small group activity in which a teacher supports readers with similar literacy needs to develop effective strategies for processing new texts at increasingly challenging levels of difficulty" (p. 2).

**Host/settlement countries:**

Countries that provide refugees with long term and/or permanent residence.

**Identity:**

As described by Norton (2000), identity is "how a person understands his or her relationship to the world, how that relationship is constructed across time and space" (p. 5).

**Immigrant:**

An individual who chooses to leave their home country to resettle in another country for reasons such as improved educational and job opportunities, and/or to reunite with family or members.

**L1:**

The first language spoken by an individual (also referred to as "native language").

**L2:**

The second or additional language spoken by an individual.

**Levelled Texts:**

Fiction and non-fiction instructional texts that are specifically designated for early emergent, emergent, early fluent and fluent readers using a standardized leveling system.

**Mutually Adaptive Learning Paradigm (MALP)**

A program specifically designed for SLIFE that incorporates conditions that are reflective of students' cultural backgrounds and are necessary for their academic success (DeCapua & Marshall, 2011a).

**Native English speaker:**

A person who spoke English as their first language.

**Narrative:**

As defined by Labov and Waletzky (1997/1967), "Any sequence of clauses that contains at least one temporal juncture" (p. 21).

**Narrative inquiry:**

The analysis of field texts containing personal stories, such as interviews, to determine the ways that individuals create meaning and knowledge in their lives.

**Narrative Unities:**

"… threads in people's lives that help account for the way in which they construct the stories that they live both in their personal lives and in their teaching" (Connelly et al., 1997, p. 671).

**Metaphor:**

Metaphors are portrayed by Connelly, Clandinin and He (1997) as linguistically based images giving "imaginative expression to personal practical knowledge" (p. 670).

**Primary School Pedagogy:**

Early literacy strategies traditionally and typically used to instruct students in the primary grades (Kindergarten to Grade 3).

**Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD):**

An anxiety disorder that some people develop after having witnessed, or directly experienced, an event or events that are extremely threatening, violent and/or have resulted in death.

**Pedagogy:**

According to Lusted (1986), pedagogy encompasses both the process and product of teaching. It involves "the process through which knowledge is produced [through exchanges between teachers and students]… [and] the 'how questions'" (p. 2) that relate to instructional practices. In addition, the term "pedagogy" also refers to the practise of teaching as a profession.

**Refugee(s):**

An individual who has been displaced or forced to leave their home country because of a natural disaster and/or war and persecution.

**Running Record:**

An early reading assessment tool developed by Clay (1993) to determine a student's instructional reading level and reading behaviours.

**Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP):**

A congregated program that was designed to support ELLs with learning content-area vocabulary by focusing on their academic literacy needs (Echevarría, Vogt, & Short, 2008).

**SIFE (Students of Interrupted Formal Education):**

A term created by the New York City Department of Education in 1996 (Advocates for Children of New York, 2010) to identify "a subpopulations of ELLs with distinctive needs who face additional challenges in school" (p. 8). SIFE were defined as immigrant students according to the following criteria: (a) came from a home in which a language other than English is spoken; (b) entered school after the second grade; (c) had at least two years less schooling than their peers; (d) function at least two years below expected grade level in reading and mathematics and; (e) may be pre-literate in their first language (pp. 8-9).

**SLIFE (Students of Limited or Interrupted Formal Education):**

An adaptation of the acronym SIFE to acknowledge that ELLs with distinctive academic needs may also have had their formal schooling interrupted due to mass violence, exile, or persecution (DeCapua et al., 2009).

**STEPs to English Proficiency continuum (STEP):**

STEP is a graduated framework for assessing and monitoring the language acquisition and literacy development of English language learners across The Ontario Curriculum (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2015).

**Teacher Attitudes:**

Passively conceived beliefs, perspectives and/or viewpoints that are often influenced by emotion and are static at a given point in time.

**Teacher Conceptions:**

Evolving beliefs and insights that form through creative mental interpretation and, over time, contribute to knowledge development.

**Traditional ESL Pedagogy:**

Language instruction that primarily relies on the transference of language-based knowledge and skills from the dominant language and focuses on large-group, thematic, and vocabulary based instruction.

## Appendix B: Interview 1 Guide for ELD Teacher

N.B. TMA = Tell me about

1. Basic background information
    - What is your date of birth?
    - Where were you born?
    - What faculty of education did you attend?
    - What year did you graduate from the faculty of education?
    - What are your division qualifications for teaching? (i.e., primary, junior, intermediate, senior)
    - What additional teaching qualifications courses have you completed?
    - How many years have you been teaching? How many years have you been teaching at the secondary level?
    - How long have you been teaching secondary SLIFE?
2. TMA your experiences as a student in high school.
    - What kind of high school did you attend?
    - TMA the student population at the high school that you attended?
    - How were you taught in elementary school? How were you taught in secondary school?
    - Who were your teacher role models? Why?
3. TMA your pre-service experiences as a student at the Faculty of Education.
    - Was there instruction regarding working with ELLs?
    - Did you receive specific information/training for working with ELLs?

- Did you receive specific information/training for working with SLIFE?
- What did you learn about teaching ELLs at the faculty of education?

4. TMA the additional qualifications courses that you have completed.
    - Why did you decide to take your ESL/ELD qualifications?
    - What did you learn in ESL/ELD Part 1, 2 and 3 regarding teaching SLIFE?
    - Was there a distinction made between ELLs with age- appropriate dominant language literacy skills and SLIFE?
    - Were you taught instructional strategies specifically appropriate for SLIFE?
5. TMA any other pre-service experiences that were related to working with SLIFE.
    - Did you previously observe SLIFE in a classroom setting or alternate setting?
    - Did you previously work with SLIFE as a volunteer?
    - Did you previously work with SLIFE in another occupation prior to teaching?
6. TMA any other general impressions that you had about refugees and/or SLIFE prior to teaching.
    - Did you read any books or movies related to refugees and/or SLIFE?
    - Did you ever have classmates who were from a refugee background?
    - Did you have conversations with others related to refugees and/or SLIFE?

## Appendix C: Interview 2 Guide for ELD Teacher

Today I'm going to ask you more specific questions about your teaching experiences with students from refugee backgrounds. I will refer to this group of English language learners as "SLIFE" (Students with Limited or Interrupted Formal Education). "SLIFE", for the purposes of this study, includes ELLs that are semi-literate or non-literate in their dominant language.

I will also refer to a few of our discussion points from our first interview for some more details or clarification.

**First, I'm interested in learning about your first teaching experience with SLIFE, prior to being an ELD English teacher.**

- What was your first experience teaching SLIFE at the secondary level?
    - What was the subject and course?
    - Approximately how many students were in the class?
    - Did the students have a range literacy skills and background education?
    - Were there also students in the class without gaps in their formal schooling (in the ESL program)?
- What was your first experience teaching SLIFE in an ELD-specific course?
    - What was the subject and course?
    - Approximately how many students were in the class?
    - Did the students have a range literacy skills and background education?

- What were your initial impressions and feelings about teaching SLIFE?
    - In our first interview, you mentioned feeling some apprehension about teaching ELLs (who were literate in their dominant language). Did you feel apprehensive about teaching SLIFE? How did this feeling compare to working with students in ESL programs?)
- What instructional strategies did you use to teach SLIFE in that first course?
    - teacher directed? student centred? individual seat work? partner work? group work?
- Did you differentiate your instruction?
    - If so, how? Were these strategies successful? (e.g., scaffolding)
    - Why or why not?
- Were there unique rewards and/or frustrations that you experienced teaching SLIFE for the first time? (as compared to ELLs in ESL programs)
    - You mentioned that you "learned easily" as a student. Did you ever feel frustrated when SLIFE are unable to understand academic content that you were teaching?
    - What was their level of engagement?

- Do you recall making any assumptions about SLIFE in your class (e.g., background knowledge, level of literacy, cultural orientation) that may have interfered with their learning?
    - asset and deficit based
- Did you have any unanswered questions about these students?
    - What were they?
    - Did you attempt to seek answers?
- How did you view your relationship with SLIFE in that first class?
    - What was the teacher/student dynamic?
    - What was your relationship with the class? With individuals?
    - Were you able to identify, on any level, with the SLIFE in your class?
    - Did you ever feel disconnected from the SLIFE in your class? Why?
- At that time, what did you consider to be your primary role as an ESL/ELD Geography teacher?
    - Did you feel successful in that role?
- Tell me about your first experience as an ELD English teacher.
- Did you ever teach a secondary ESL English class?
    - If so, what was the course?
- When did you begin teaching a secondary ELD English class?
    - What was the course?

    - Approximately how many students were in the class?
    - Did the students have a range literacy skills and background education?
- Did you choose to teach that class?
    - If so, why did you “take the leap” again?
- What were your initial impressions and feelings about teaching SLIFE in an ELD English course?
- What instructional strategies did you use to teach SLIFE in the ELD English course?
    - teacher directed? student centred? individual / partner / group work?
- Did you differentiate your instruction?
    - If so, how? Were these strategies successful? (e.g., scaffolding)
    - Why or why not?
- What successes did you experience teaching SLIFE in an ELD English course (as compared to a content area course)?
    - more similar learning needs?
- What challenges did you experience teaching SLIFE in an ELD English course (as compared to a content area course)? level of student engagement?
- Did you transfer any instructional strategies that you used with ELLs/SLIFE in the Geography course to the ELD English course?
- What was the result? Were these strategies successful?

- What did you do differently?
- How did you view your relationship with SLIFE in the ELD English class?
    - What was the teacher/student dynamic?
    - What was your relationship with the group? With individuals?
    - Were you able to identify on any level with the SLIFE in your class?
    - Did you ever feel disconnected from the SLIFE in your class?
- Were there opportunities to collaborate with colleagues teaching the same students?
    - Collaborate on what aspects of teaching? Lesson planning? Assessment? Student needs? To what extent?
- At that time, what did you consider to be your primary role as an ELD English teacher?
    - Did you feel successful in that role?

## Appendix D: Interview 3 Guide for ELD Teacher

N.B. TMA = Tell me about

1. **TMA your experiences as a ELD English teacher within the context of an early literacy instructional framework.**
    - How has the ELD Early Literacy Program affected your teaching? (instructional strategies, planning, assessment, teacher/student directed)
    - What components of the program do you like the most? The least?
    - How has the ELD Early Literacy Program affected your view of SLIFE?
    - TMA your successes as a teacher in this program?
    - TMA things that you didn't expect to happen in this program.
    - TMA your frustrations/current struggles?
    - What motivates you in this program?
    - What have you observed regarding the students' responses to the early literacy strategies?
    - What specific components of the program have been most helpful for SLIFE? Why?
    - TMA how the early literacy program may assist SLIFE with socio-emotional issues (i.e., prior traumatic experiences)
    - TMA how has a more explicit and direct approach to teaching influenced student learning? Confidence? Engagement?

- TMA how the early literacy program has affected how you teach SLIFE in your ELD Geography class.
- How do you view your current teaching role with SLIFE? Can you think of a metaphor to describe it?
- TMA your wishes, hopes, personal goals for the program.
- Do you feel any restrictions and/or limitations as a teacher in this program?
- Do you have any unanswered questions about the program?

## Appendix E: Informed Consent Form

Wilfrid Laurier
University


### ELD TEACHER INFORMED CONSENT STATEMENT

Shifting Pedagogy for SLIFE: A Case Study Exploration of the Professional Experiences of a Secondary School English Literacy Development (ELD) Teacher
Stephanie M. Ledger, MEd (in process), Principal Investigator

**INFORMATION**
My name is Stephanie Ledger and I am a graduate student in the Master of Education program at Wilfrid Laurier University. I am inviting you to participate in a research study. Involvement in the study is voluntary, so you may choose to participate or not. This letter will explain the study to you. Please feel free to ask questions about the research if you have any. I will be happy to explain anything in greater detail if you wish.

The title of the project is *Shifting Pedagogy for SLIFE: A Case Study Exploration of the Professional Experiences of a Secondary School English Literacy Development (ELD) Teacher.* I am interested in learning more about how you are developing your professional knowledge base to work within an English Literacy Development (ELD program rooted in early literacy pedagogy.

I would like to engage you in a series of three semi-structured interviews, which will be audio recorded in their entirety. Each interview will last for a duration of 1.5 hours for a total of 4.5 hours. These interviews will take place at intervals over a month. Following each interview, I will listen to the audio recording and manually transcribe our conversation. I will then follow the "member check" protocol by giving you the opportunity to read the transcript to confirm that the data is correct. You will then be given the opportunity to delete or add information from the transcript.

All information collected during, and resulting from, our interviews, including audio recordings and my researcher diary reflections, will be kept *confidential*. You may

access these sources of data at any time. Please note, because this project employs e-based data collection techniques (e.g., digitally recorded audio, word-processed transcriptions), the confidentiality and privacy of data cannot be guaranteed during web-based transmission; however, web-based transmission will be kept to a minimum (i.e., e-mail communication exclusively between the researcher and collaborating ELD teacher during the member check process).

My initial questions during each interview will stem from an interview guide that I have created, however unscripted questions will follow and will be influenced by your responses to the pre-set questions. Additionally, the following steps will provide a structure for the interview process:

1. Interview #1
2. Researcher transcribes data
3. Member check
4. Researcher adjusts transcription if and as requested by participant
5. Interview #2
6. Researcher transcribes data
7. Member check
8. Researcher adjusts transcription if and as requested by participant
9. Interview #3
10. Researcher transcribes data
11. Member check
12. Researcher adjusts transcription if and as requested by participant

**RISKS and PARTICIPATION**

There are a few minor risks if you choose to participate in this study. Focussed early literacy instruction for secondary SLIFE is uncommon and, because you are a teacher within a relatively small and specialized program, you may be identifiable by your colleagues when this study is published. To minimize this risk, you will be assigned a pseudonym and all other identifying information will either be removed or changed in the transcripts and any potential publications resulting from this study.

Additionally, I would like to inform you that, as a colleague and researcher, I have no supervisory jurisdiction over you. We are equal status co-workers. Any information, opinions and reflections that you disclose during the interview process will not affect or influence your employment or job status as a teacher in any way.

Your participation, however, in this study is voluntary; you may decline to participate without penalty. If you decide to participate, you may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. If you withdraw from the study, every attempt will be made to remove your data from the study, and have it destroyed. You have the right to omit any question(s)/procedure(s) you choose.

**BENEFITS**

I envision multiple benefits resulting from your participation in this study. Firstly, you will have an opportunity to reflect deeply on your past and current teaching experiences with SLIFE. This will, potentially, contribute in positive ways to your professional growth and practices as an ELD teacher. Additionally, your participation may influence the perspectives of other teachers who are struggling to teach SLIFE basic language and print literacy skills. As well, the information you provide may also be used to improve programming for SLIFE and, though program change is not guaranteed. Finally, the results of this study may help schools within school boards in Ontario and elsewhere better support the professional development needs of secondary ELD teachers by providing them with research-based instructional strategies for working with SLIFE.

**CONFIDENTIALITY**

Any information collected from interviews and/or recorded about you in my researchers' diary will be kept completely anonymous. That is, your name will not be associated with anything you say during interviews or informal conversations. Everything you say will be kept confidential and private. Any transcribed interview data will be identified by code number and stored in a locked filing cabinet to protect the confidentiality of your responses. Please note that your name will not be associated in any way with your responses. Should you consent to the use of your quotations, these may be used in published academic and practitioner journals, books and/or professional conferences and in-services, without your name attached. You may also choose to take part in the project but not have your quotations used in the final report. All data (i.e., audio recordings, transcripts and diary notes) will be secured: paper data will be physically stored in a locked filing cabinet and the digital recordings of the interviews will be protected on password protected computers. Following the end of this research project, and the publication of my thesis, I will personally erase all audio recordings from my audio recorder and computer. All hard copy data (i.e., transcriptions and the researcher's diary) will be held for seven years, consistent with American Psychological Association standards, and will be destroyed by August 1, 2023.

**COMPENSATION**

No compensation is offered for participation in this research.

**FEEDBACK AND PUBLICATION**

I hope to publish my learning from this study in education-related professional journals, a book and/or conference proceedings; however, in any professional publication or conference proceeding, your identity will remain confidential. I will change your name and any identifying information from any public display of the results of this project. Upon the completion of this research study, I will provide you with an executive summary of your contributions to this project.

**CONTACT**
If you have questions at any time about the study or the procedures, (or you experience adverse effects because of participating in this study) you may contact the researcher, Stephanie Ledger at **226-929-3866, or by email:** Ledg5500@mylaurier.ca. This project has been reviewed and approved by the University Research Ethics Board. If you feel you have not been treated according to the descriptions in this form, or your rights as a participant in research have been violated during this project, you may contact Dr. Robert Basso, Chair, University Research Ethics Board, Wilfrid Laurier University, (519) 884-1970, extension 4994 or rbasso@wlu.ca

Please initial on appropriate line for the following two sets of statements:

1) _____ **I agree** to participate in three, 1.5-hour audio-taped interviews.

**OR**

_____ **I do not agree** to participate in three, 1.5-hour audio-taped interviews.

2) _____ **I agree** to have my direct quotes used in any professional publication and/or presentation. I understand that when my direct quotes are used my identity will be maintained confidential—the researcher will change my name and any identifying information from any public display of the results of this project.

**OR**

_____ **I do not agree** to have my direct quotes used in any professional publication and/or presentation.

_____ _____
Signature of participant Date

_____ _____
Print name of participant Age: Years and Months

_____ _____
Signature of investigator Date

Stephanie M. Ledger
Print name of investigator

**Should you wish to receive a copy of an executive summary of your contributions to this research project, please include your email and/or postal address below.**

Email address:

_____

Postal Mailing address:

Street:

_____

City and Province:

_____

Postal Code:

_____

Telephone #:

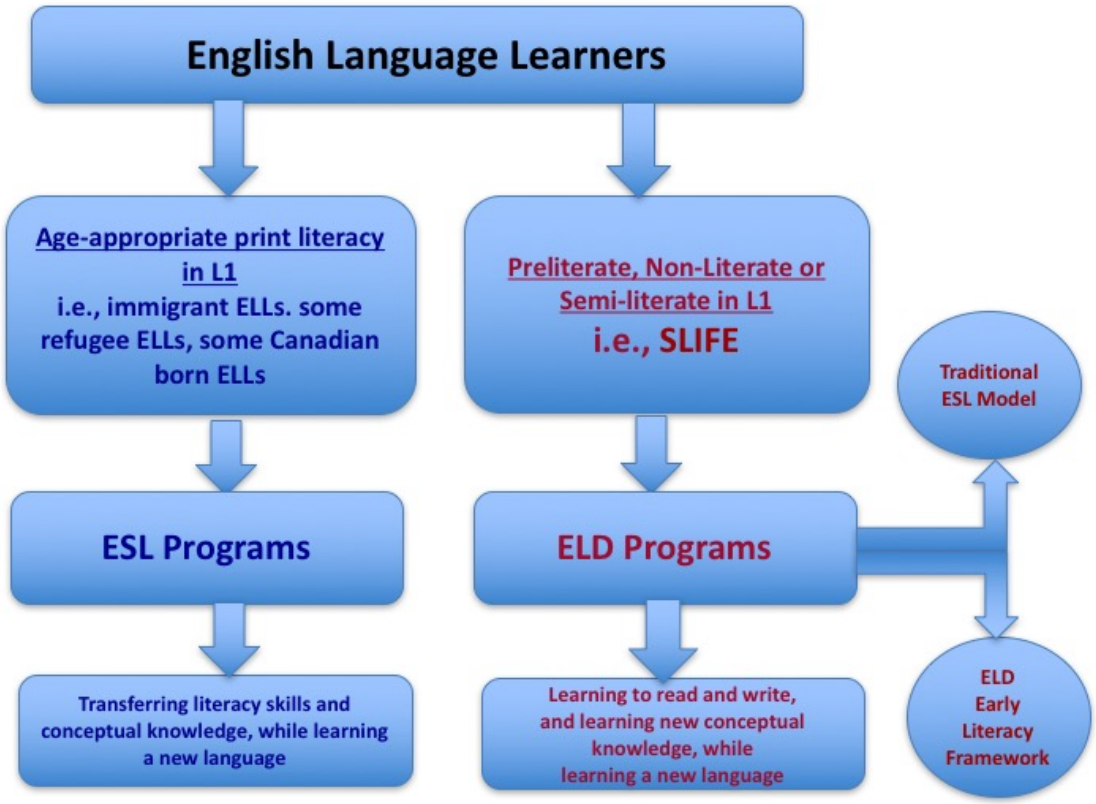
_____

## Appendix F: Data Analysis Walk-through

| Raw Data/Quote | Lean Codes | Expanded Codes | Thematic Analysis (within context of literature/theoretical framework) | Implications |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| "I feel like my teaching is a piece of everyone else. I've encountered other teachers and said 'Oh, I like that' and I take that part of it and so it's like a puzzle of different pieces from the different teachers that I've worked with in the past." | Conceptions About Conditions for Success (regarding relationships with colleagues in pre-service and AQ courses) | metaphor<br>learning from others<br>mentorship<br>learning from prior experiences<br>reflection<br>building upon/developing professional knowledge<br>humility<br>openness<br>receptiveness | • Personal Practical Knowledge (Clandinin, 1985)<br>• Connelly, Clandinin and He (Connelly et al., 1997) use of metaphor as a means of exploring "intellectual avenues" of PPK<br>• an evolution of conceptions about pedagogy over time<br>• PPK informed current practice | A teacher's PPK may influence their professional knowledge development, over time… which may make some teachers more likely than others to shift their instructional strategies to meet needs of SLIFE |
| "We learn from each other [and] are each experts in different ways…there's not one person directing everything but, [instead], things are directed by our students' needs… I think a program like this cannot work in isolation". | Conceptions About Conditions for Success (regarding relationships with teaching colleagues and SLIFE) | shared knowledge<br>respect for others' knowledge<br>co-construction of knowledge<br>shared leadership<br>dynamic<br>flattened hierarchy<br>common goal (student success)<br>collaboration, teamwork<br>learning community | • Learning Through Social Interaction (Vygotsky)<br>• Delpit (1988)<br>• critical constructivism<br>• "students have an important voice in their own learning" (p. 288) and that their "expertness" should be recognized<br>• Parallels Sara's "Mini-Experts": shared leadership dynamic (colleagues), "expertness" (of students) impacting self-efficacy and professional learning | Teachers of SLIFE may benefit from systemically established conditions that foster collaborative learning opportunities as well as an equitable distribution of leadership and knowledge (between colleagues and with SLIFE) |

## Appendix E: Figures

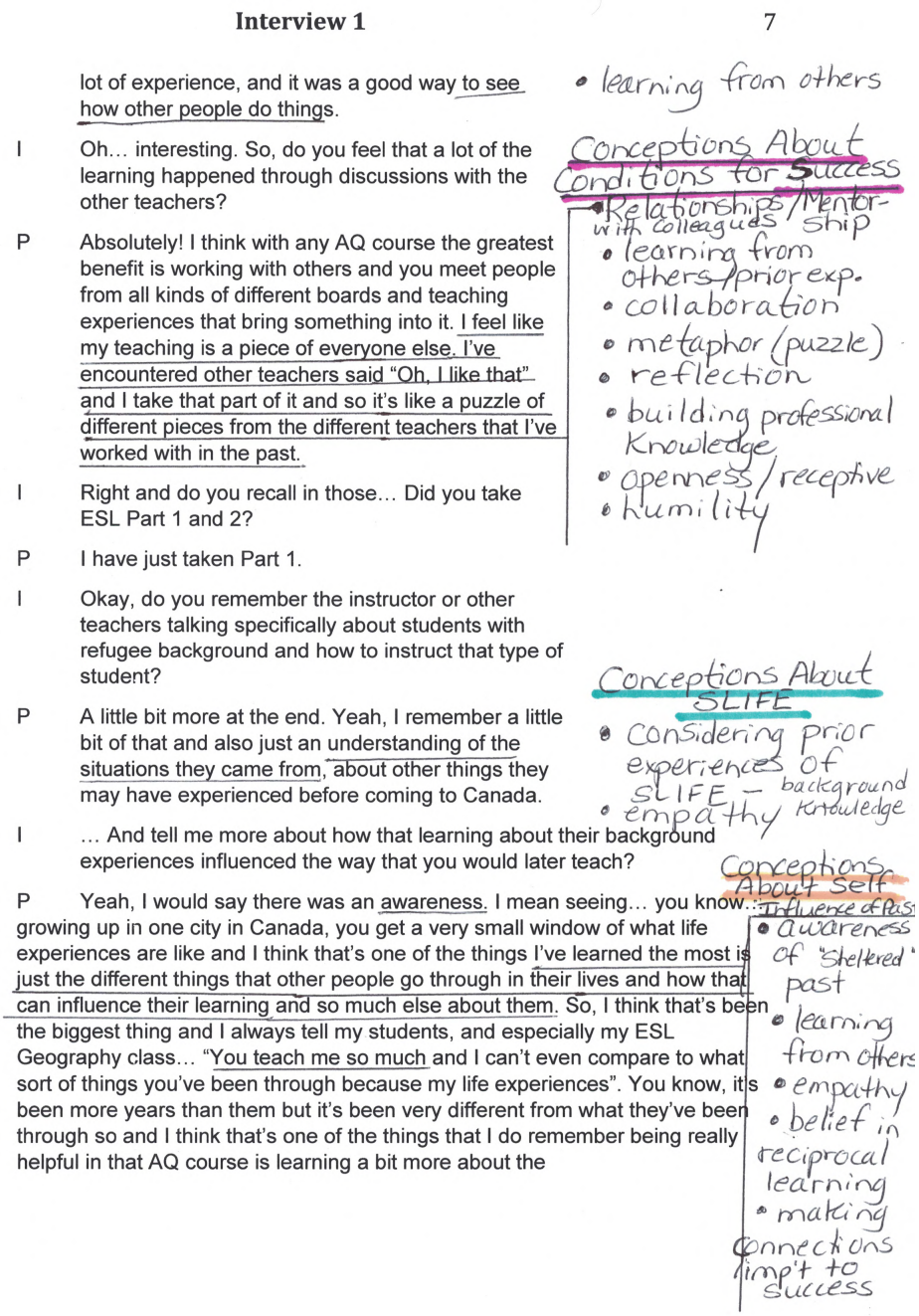
Figure 1. Graphic representation of Ontario language programming for English language learners.



Figures 2 and 3 present my transcription data that corresponds with my data analysis walk-through examples (Appendix F). Both figures show an example of my data analysis process, beginning with coding and followed by thematic analysis. I have selected two examples that show how my codes were collapsed to create the thematic category “Conceptions About Conditions for Success”. Together, the data in the two figures indicates that, over time, there were unifying elements in Sara’s professional knowledge development.

Figure 2: Sample Data Analysis.

Figure 2 is an excerpt from my Interview 1 transcription. This interview focussed on Sara's early life experiences as an elementary and secondary student, as well as a pre-service student. My codes are bulleted and my thematic categories are colour-coded. The pink highlighting designates the thematic category "Conceptions About Conditions for Success", which arose from collapsing my codes.



**Interview 1** 7

lot of experience, and it was a good way to see how other people do things.

I Oh… interesting. So, do you feel that a lot of the learning happened through discussions with the other teachers?

P Absolutely! I think with any AQ course the greatest benefit is working with others and you meet people from all kinds of different boards and teaching experiences that bring something into it. I feel like my teaching is a piece of everyone else. I've encountered other teachers said "Oh, I like that" and I take that part of it and so it's like a puzzle of different pieces from the different teachers that I've worked with in the past.

I Right and do you recall in those… Did you take ESL Part 1 and 2?

P I have just taken Part 1.

I Okay, do you remember the instructor or other teachers talking specifically about students with refugee background and how to instruct that type of student?

P A little bit more at the end. Yeah, I remember a little bit of that and also just an understanding of the situations they came from, about other things they may have experienced before coming to Canada.

I … And tell me more about how that learning about their background experiences influenced the way that you would later teach?

P Yeah, I would say there was an awareness. I mean seeing… you know… growing up in one city in Canada, you get a very small window of what life experiences are like and I think that's one of the things I've learned the most is just the different things that other people go through in their lives and how that can influence their learning and so much else about them. So, I think that's been the biggest thing and I always tell my students, and especially my ESL Geography class… "You teach me so much and I can't even compare to what sort of things you've been through because my life experiences". You know, it's been more years than them but it's been very different from what they've been through so and I think that's one of the things that I do remember being really helpful in that AQ course is learning a bit more about the

- learning from others

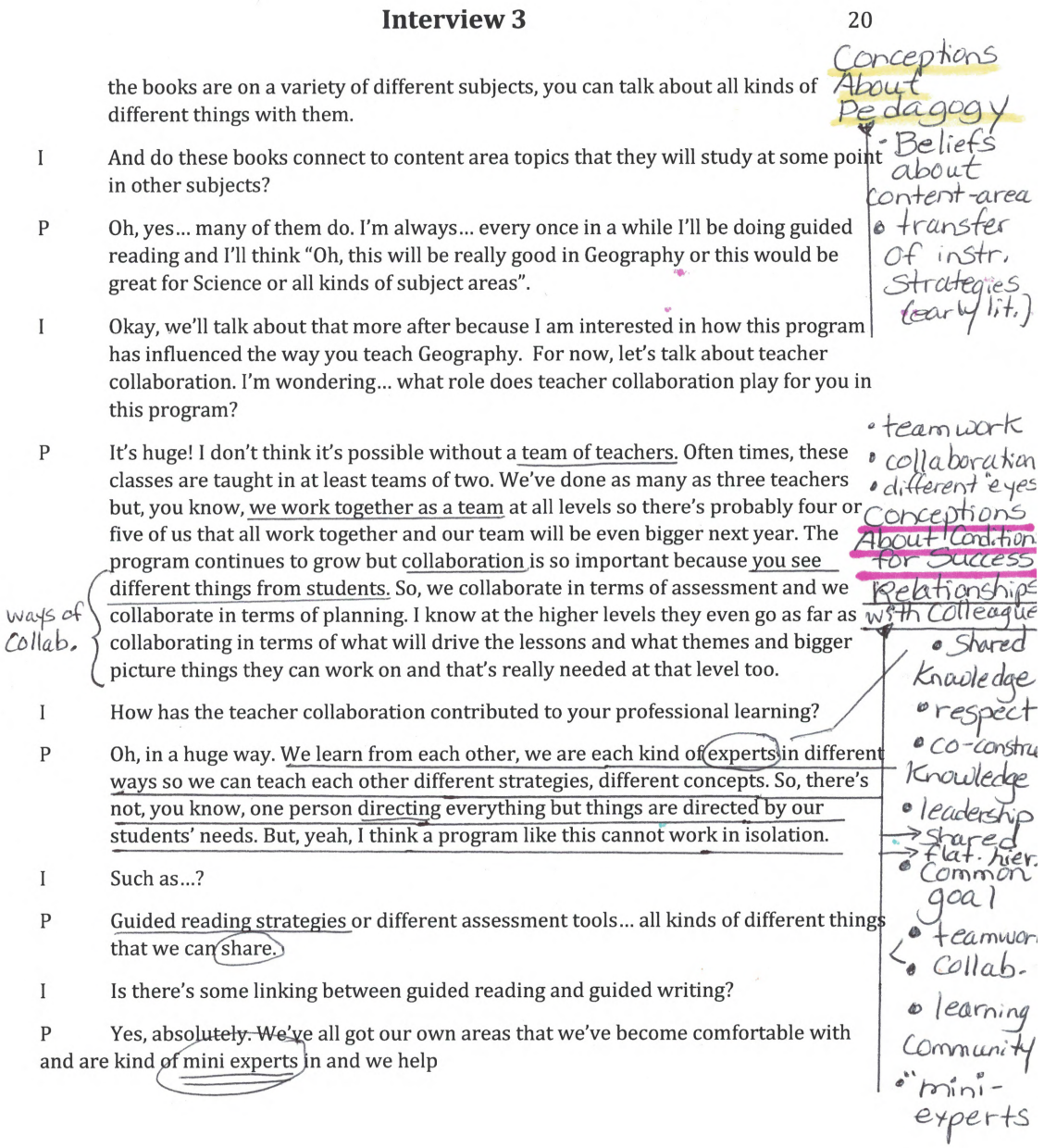
Conceptions About Conditions for Success
- Relationships/Mentorship with colleagues
- learning from others/prior exp.
- collaboration
- metaphor (puzzle)
- reflection
- building professional knowledge
- openness/receptive
- humility

Conceptions About SLIFE
- considering prior experiences of SLIFE – background knowledge
- empathy

Conceptions About Self
- influence of past
- awareness of "sheltered" past
- learning from others
- empathy
- belief in reciprocal learning
- making connections
- imp't to success

Figure 3: Sample Data Analysis

Figure 3 is an excerpt from my Interview 3 transcription. This interview focussed on Sara's professional experiences as an ELD English teacher of SLIFE within an early literacy program. My codes are bulleted and my thematic categories are colour-coded. The pink highlighting designates the thematic category "Conceptions About Conditions for Success", which arose from collapsing my codes.



**Interview 3** 20

the books are on a variety of different subjects, you can talk about all kinds of different things with them.

I And do these books connect to content area topics that they will study at some point in other subjects?

P Oh, yes... many of them do. I'm always... every once in a while I'll be doing guided reading and I'll think "Oh, this will be really good in Geography or this would be great for Science or all kinds of subject areas".

I Okay, we'll talk about that more after because I am interested in how this program has influenced the way you teach Geography. For now, let's talk about teacher collaboration. I'm wondering... what role does teacher collaboration play for you in this program?

P It's huge! I don't think it's possible without a team of teachers. Often times, these classes are taught in at least teams of two. We've done as many as three teachers but, you know, we work together as a team at all levels so there's probably four or five of us that all work together and our team will be even bigger next year. The program continues to grow but collaboration is so important because you see different things from students. So, we collaborate in terms of assessment and we collaborate in terms of planning. I know at the higher levels they even go as far as collaborating in terms of what will drive the lessons and what themes and bigger picture things they can work on and that's really needed at that level too.

I How has the teacher collaboration contributed to your professional learning?

P Oh, in a huge way. We learn from each other, we are each kind of experts in different ways so we can teach each other different strategies, different concepts. So, there's not, you know, one person directing everything but things are directed by our students' needs. But, yeah, I think a program like this cannot work in isolation.

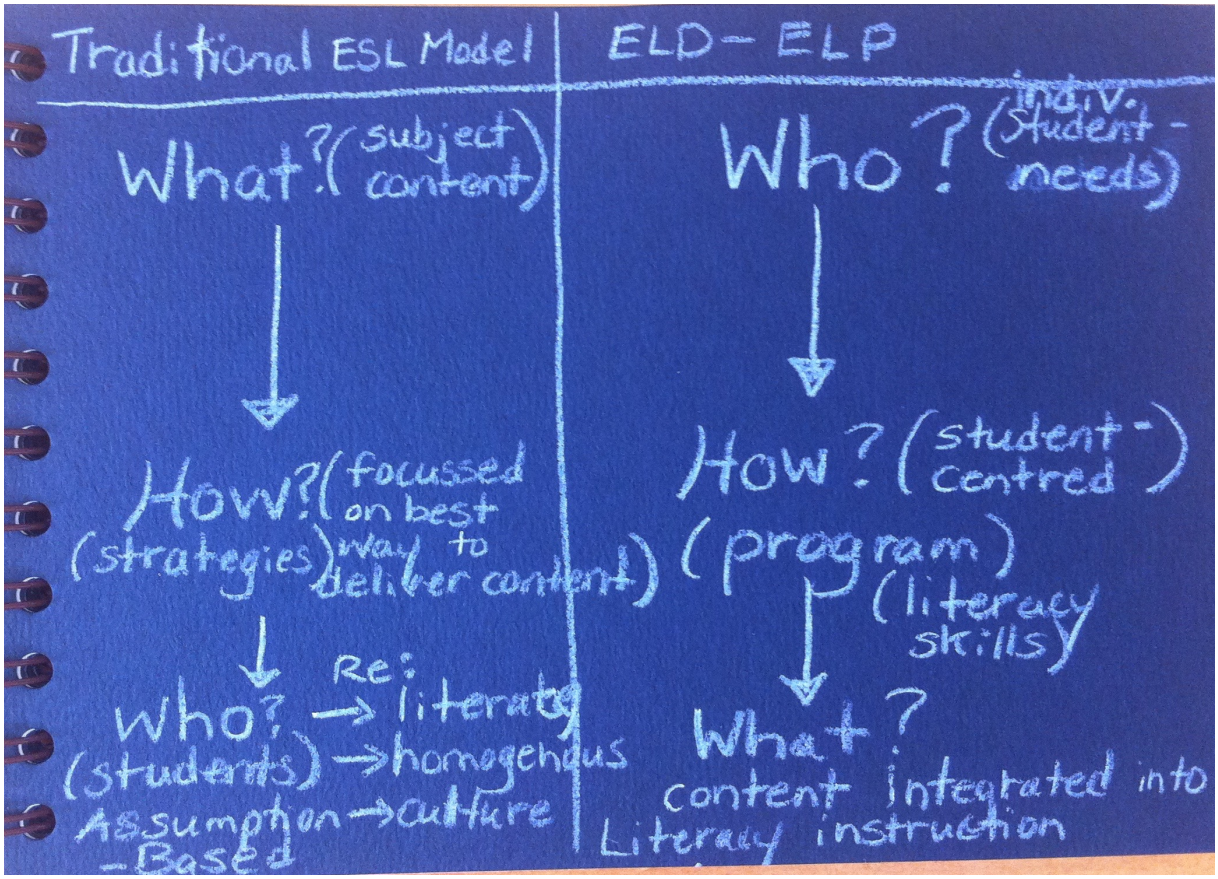
I Such as...?

P Guided reading strategies or different assessment tools... all kinds of different things that we can share.

I Is there's some linking between guided reading and guided writing?

P Yes, absolutely. We've all got our own areas that we've become comfortable with and are kind of mini experts in and we help

Figure 4: Researcher's Diary Excerpt



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